

STEPHEN GOES TO SEA

Arthur O. Cooke

David

With Xmas Wishes

o love from

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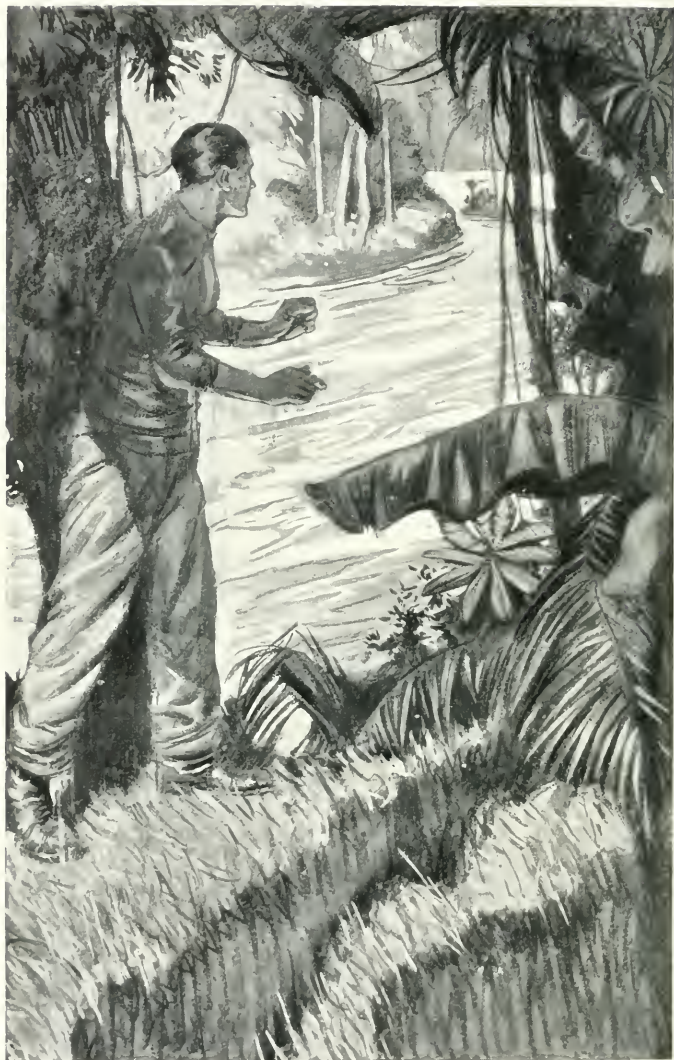
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IT SWEEPED ROUND A BEND

Page 104

Frontispiece

Stephen Goes to Sea

BY

ARTHUR O. COOKE

Author of "Planter Dick" "Godfrey Gets There" &c.

Illustrated by Leo Bates

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STEPHEN GOES TO SEA

CHAPTER I

Captain Phipps gets his Way

This story, let me tell the reader, will have no connection with the War; and yet the War is the main reason for the telling of my tale. Most likely it would never have been written—as indeed it is not written yet, and may perhaps break down in the middle—were it not that I am helpless for all active work. Here am I, Stephen Lockitt, sitting in the little cob-walled house where I was born, with one leg just as sound as ever, but the other somewhere in the Channel, whither it was carried from our trawler by a shot fired from a German submarine. So, being less active than I used to be, and having a good deal of leisure time, it seems to me that I might fill in some of it by setting down some strange adventures that I went through twenty years ago.

First, just a word or two about my birthplace and my early life; for that is necessary if I am to make things clear.

The little window by the kitchen chimney, deep-set

in the whitewashed wall of "cob", looks out upon a little alley, with a glimpse of Denmouth harbour, where a six-knot tide is flowing in. The alley opens on the shoreward end of the small esplanade—the "front" we call it—where some eight or ten old-fashioned good-sized houses, standing back in large and pleasant gardens, look across the estuary and harbour of the River Dene to Denmouth town.

Beyond the front there is a strip of rocky shore, with, at low tide, a large deep pool in which I learnt, like many other Sheldon boys, to swim. The rocks end, seaward, in the Ness, a high red sandstone cliff that stands well out beyond the bar.

From the front stretches up the river-side a row of smaller houses, shops, the coastguard station, the Crown Inn; and farther still the larger portion of the village stands around a big three-sided green, which has a fine old church at the far end. Such then is Sheldon village, where I was born in the year 18—, and where I live to-day.

It stands upon the right bank of the River Dene, which comes down from the Dartmoor hills. Denmouth, lying on the farther shore, is a great place for summer visitors; it has a stretch of sand extending for two miles or more, and at the south end jutting out as if to meet the Ness. So that although the harbour, at high water, is five hundred yards across, the channel that leads seaward past the spit is not a quarter of that breadth; and day and night, save for a short half-hour at full flood and slack, the tide runs in or out at a tremendous pace, and with a sound

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extremely pleasant to the ears of anyone who loves the sea.

Across the harbour from our village to the little town ply ferry-boats, and half a mile up-stream is a long wooden trestle bridge.

The traffic to the port is small but steady; few days pass but what at least one ship, and sometimes three or four, go in or out. So now, as in the days of which I write, there are five Trinity pilots; three of them lived in Denmouth, while of the two in Sheldon my father was one.

I think I see him now, as clear as when he was alive: a little under middle height, and getting stout; red-faced, black-eyed, clean shaven, with a smile, a joke, a friendly word for all. I can recall him best on a fine summer morning when, towards eight o'clock and while my stepmother was getting breakfast, he would stroll down, coatless, in his spotless shirt-sleeves, and a pair of carpet slippers on his feet, to the small front. There, taking his telescope from underneath his arm, he would look out to sea for any vessel Denmouth-bound.

Our most regular trader was a small steamer that came fortnightly from Sweden with wood-pulp consigned to paper-mills lying in the valley of the Exe. All coal, too, came by sea; and so did flour, "artificial" for the farmers, bricks and tiles from Bridgewater, with other heavy goods.

We have one export, too, and that of some importance—china clay. Seven miles up-stream, just at the head of tidal water, is the town of Newton Prior, near to

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which this china clay is found. It is dug out from pits in big square lumps, which are brought down the Dene in barges, to be shipped in brigs and schooners, ketches, barques and barquentines. These carry the clay to many ports, both in England and upon the Continent.

So, for a little place like Sheldon, there was quite a lot of foreign trade, and of talk that made a boy familiar with strange names, and, if he had a taste that way, might make him eager to see something of a world that lay beyond the bounds of Sheldon beach and Denmouth docks.

I think the longing for the sea and for a roving life was in my blood, and was increased and not created by the talk I heard and by the scraps of practice I picked up. Sometimes, in one of our two harbour tugs, my father took me down as far as Plymouth, even Falmouth, to bring up some vessel "light". No one more welcome, after Tom Lockitt, than Tom Lockitt's son; and I soon found my sea-legs, learnt to haul upon a rope, and even steer.

Strong, too, was the influence of the books I read. After three years at Sheldon school I went across to Denmouth for a time, and later to the still better school at Newton Prior, going daily to and fro by train. There the headmaster lent me books, and I got others from the public library. Tales, travels, natural history, but particularly books about far-distant lands, I used to read with great delight. And so I reached my fourteenth birthday, and there came a talk of what I was to do.

I have already spoken of my stepmother. My own mother had died when I was a baby, and a year or two later my father married again. His second wife was an excellent woman, who was always very kind to me. She was a woman born and bred inland, with little liking for the sea; and I now found out that she had got a plan all ready for me, cut and dried.

She had a brother who was manager of Sylvester & Ashford's cider-works in Newton Prior. He used to come and see us on a Sunday now and then, and I always contrasted him, much to his disadvantage, with my own father's burly sea-going figure and round jolly face. Caleb Yeo was a thin, spruce, prim-mannered man of about forty-five, with a long hatchet face and trim side-whiskers. He was proud of himself, and still prouder, I think—if that were possible—of Sylvester & Ashford's firm, which he regarded as the finest house of business upon earth. He was a fluent talker, and his conversation turned for ever on the glories of the firm.

My father used to sit and listen to him with all due respect, but always seemed to me to shake his shoulders with a sense of freedom when our guest was gone. As for myself, my Uncle Yeo was very little to my taste. He was no reader, save in the firm's ledgers, and he shook his head when I once ventured to impart some information from my books.

"Not practical, my boy; no use for men in our position," was his comment; "accurate figures and a neat handwriting—those are the things wanted in a business house."

Judge then of my dismay when I was one day told that very shortly "our firm" was to be mine. I was fourteen and a half, and was to leave school the following Christmas. There would then be a vacancy for a junior clerk in the great cider business. Yeo was much valued and had influence with Mr. Ashford—Sylvester was now a name and nothing more. My stepmother's brother had secured the place for me; and she, I found, fully intended me to take it and be duly thankful all my life.

"Best do as Mother tells you, Stephen," were words often on my father's lips when little differences cropped up; and now, to my disgust, he set forth reasons why I should accept the prospect offered me.

"Sea life is not all beer and skittles, Stephen; don't you think it; sailor's work is often very rough. There's very little money in it anyway—just look at me. Yeo's a good fellow in his way, and if you do your best he'll push you on. And, see here, Stephen, you're the only lad I've got; I'd like to keep you here at home with me. You'll have your afternoons on Saturdays, and all day Sundays, and we'll get a trip across the bar."

I shared to some extent my father's easy-going nature and his hatred of dispute; and it is likely that, had nothing intervened, I should have gone to Sylvester & Ashford's, and this tale would never have been told.

Something, however, did intervene. Measles was prevalent in Newton Prior all that summer, and I took it in July. I had it rather badly, and a cough and other complications hung about me for some weeks.

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There was no question of my going back to school for a last term that autumn, and the doctor said a change would do me good. My stepmother suggested Dartmoor air, and spoke of sending me to relatives of hers who lived upon the moor. The doctor did not quite agree.

"A trip to sea would really be the best," he said, "blow the germs out of him in no time and quite set him up."

My stepmother did not take kindly to the notion; and no more was said of it for a few days.

My father made friends everywhere he went, and one of many was Joe Phipps, a Plymouth man. Phipps was the skipper of the *Early Bird*, the latest-built and largest of a little fleet of Plymouth-owned steam trawlers. I had met Captain Phipps already when accompanying my father on a trip to Plymouth, and the trawler skipper had secured my admiration by his giant bulk and kindly ways. He stood full six feet three and was broad to match, had a voice like a bull, the strength of a giant, and the kindness of a woman. Moreover, he had run away to sea when ten years old.

It chanced that, while I was still convalescent, business brought Phipps up one afternoon to Denmouth, and he came across to us for tea. I still remember how he had to duck his curly head at every lintel of our low-doored house. He had a tribe of children of his own, and looked with sympathy at my pale face.

"Give him a trip along o' me, ma'am, and I'll bring him back to you as right as rain," he told my step-

mother as he drank his tea. "That's what I did wi' my third young 'un when he'd had the fever, and you'm oughted to ha' seen him arter—sound as a bell he were, and rosy as could be. No trouble, and no cost to you—only too happy to oblige a friend. The boss'll let him come wi' pleasure when I on'y name it to him, don't you doubt. For twelve months I've been bringing home rare catches, and, if he's down a bit on failures, there ain't nothin' he won't do for them as finds the fish."

But my stepmother shook her head.

"Thank you very kindly, Mr. Phipps, and have another cut-round—do," she urged him as she passed the plate; "but I don't think as it would do for Stephen. 'Praise the sea, but keep on land'; that's what my mother always said."

"Now look here, missus," said the skipper, laying a big brown hand upon her arm; "the *Early Bird*—best little trawler in the trade she be, bar none—goes out o' Sutton Pool come Tuesday for her last trip to the Porcupine; that's nigh upon two hundred mile off Ireland, as you well know." I don't suppose my stepmother had ever heard of that most famous fishing-ground. "We shall be gone a fortnight or three weeks; back home and then begin the winter trips across the Bay, down Portugal, and all that coast. You have the boy all ready in some three weeks' time, and let 'un come along wi' me."

He looked hard at my stepmother's unyielding face, glanced at me, then at my father, and I saw him wink.

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"Stephen," remarked my father, who could take a hint, "step out and see if Gilpin's on the front."

I went out, and there found my father's fellow-pilot on the watch; the Swedish steamer was expected in that night. As I came slowly back, and passed the open window, I heard Phipps's hearty voice.

"I understand you, missus, right enough; he wants to go to sea, and you had rather as he stayed ashore; that's nought but nat'ral. Well now, d'ye see, the sea is either in him or it ain't. If it *be* in him, nothing you can do'll drive it out, and you can lay your life on that. If it ain't in him—nothin' but a sort o' fancy—then if a south'ard trip aboard the *Early Bird* about October doesn't knock it out o' him, there's nothin' will. Danger? Good Lord, no, not a bit o' danger; but a tossing and a turn-up as'll cure him o' the sea, if so be as he *can* be cured."

"There's something in that, Mother. What d'you think?" my father said as I was going in.

If anyone had told me that my stepmother could be talked over in the course of half an hour by a big breezy seaman whom she saw for the first time, I should have answered that her character was little known. But I suppose I did not know it; anyway Phipps seemed to sweep her off her feet. Before he went away that night his jolly offer was accepted, and I was to join the *Early Bird* in three weeks' time.

So, on a morning early in October, I first saw the trawler lying berthed in Sutton Pool, off Plymouth Sound. I had come down the night before and slept at Phipps's house. His wife was stout and jolly, like

himself; the children swarmed in the large rambling house whose front door opened on the quay. Used as I was to all the quiet of our little home, and not too much accustomed to companions of my age, I was bewildered by the noisy, free-and-easy life they led, and was not sorry when we parted the next day. Beside the skipper, who strode on with my small bag and rug upon his arm, I walked across the quay to Sutton Pool, where gulls were circling, swooping, screaming, underneath the pale-blue autumn sky. An ancient boatman sculled us over to the farther wharf, at which the trawler lay.

It was eleven when the tide served for us to leave. The skipper took me up into the wheelhouse, and my heart beat quickly as he pulled the siren-cord that hung above his head. A cruise as far as Plymouth—that was nothing when compared with what was going to happen now. I was away to sea; should soon be out of sight of land. I closed my mind to the thought that it was only for a fortnight or three weeks.

The siren-blast rang boldly, echoed and re-echoed from the quaint old houses grouped about the Pool, and set the gulls all screaming wildly in alarm. Again it sounded, and the white jet of escaping steam flew swiftly on the north-east breeze. Slowly and cautiously the *Early Bird*, freed from the warps that held her to the quay, crept out into the middle of the Pool, and waited while a man in a small boat cast off her headline from a buoy. The wheel spun round, the trawler slid between the sides of the dock entrance, and we glided out into the Sound.

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The skipper and I stood beside the steersman; from the high fore-castle-head the "look-out" called out warnings as to vessels on the move. The siren screamed at intervals as we moved down the outer harbour, passing war-ships, steamers, sailing-ships, tugs, craft of every kind. Then the way cleared before us, and the *Early Bird* could show her speed. Drake's Island slipped behind us; Cawsand and the breakwater were passed, and Penlee Point rose high upon the starboard bow. Then we were in the open sea, the stately column of the Eddystone far off upon our port.

"See it again in three weeks' time, my sonny," said the skipper, patting me on the shoulder with a kindly hand. He little dreamt, nor I, how many thousand miles I was to travel, what strange lands I was to know, and what strange company to keep, before I saw the Eddystone and Penlee Point again.

CHAPTER II

The “Early Bird”

The *Early Bird* was certainly a boat of which her skipper might be proud. Her hull was painted a bright apple-green, with a broad band of red below the rail. The white band round her funnel had a red flag on it; on the flag was a blue square, and in the middle of the square a Maltese cross in white. Above the band appeared her number, with PH to indicate her port.

She was well over a hundred feet in length, and she could steam eleven, or at a push twelve knots. Unlike her sister-ships, whose captains had a berth that opened from the general cabin, she was provided with a private cabin for her skipper, on the level of the deck, immediately below the chartroom and wheel-house. It had no door, but was entered from the chartroom by means of a companion ladder. This little cabin the good skipper had insisted upon giving up to me.

I was extremely proud of it. It was very comfortably fitted, being even lighted with acetylene gas, which was also installed on deck for use when the

trawl was being hauled at night, or other work going on.

Two or three of the hands berthed in the fore-castle, which filled the vessel's bow and had a high "whale-back". This whale-back rather hid the view of anything quite close ahead; but, on the other hand, it broke a lot of water that would otherwise have come on board the trawler when she steamed against a strong head-sea.

Aft of the entrance to the fore-castle there was a hold for ropes, oil, a spare trawl, and such-like stores; and aft of that again was the ice-hold, which would take some forty tons of broken ice on which to store the fish. Out of the ice-hold was a door leading to the fish-hold, which, of course, had also a hatch on deck. The fish-hold was divided into "boxes", something like a double row of stalls in a stable, with a gangway leading down between. Just forward of my cabin stood the donkey-engine and the winch, which latter had two "drums" on which were wound the wire warps that towed the trawl.

Behind the engine-room was the main cabin, where all took their meals. The mate and chief engineer each had a tiny cabin leading off it, while the cook and bos'n slept in bunks placed round its sides.

On deck, immediately behind the engine casing, was the galley, which you had to enter to go down below; the cabin companion branched off from one leading to the engine-room. If you were feeling—well, not over hungry about dinner-time, it was not worth the trouble to go down at all; the smell of

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cooking would be pretty strong in Charley's galley, while from the engine-room a blast of hot air met you, with a taste of oil in it. So by the time you reached the cabin, and saw dinner on the table, you had had about enough.

"Turn you up, do it?" said the old cook, grinning, as, on our first day out, he saw me stop half-way and make a bolt for deck; "eh, sonny, it'll do you good. You go and get it off your chest; then you'll feel better, and I'll make you some o' my fish-cakes for tea."

A queer old stick was Charley, but a real good sort, and very kind to me; but so, indeed, were all the hands. Charley was tall but stooping, lean, bald-headed, with a heavy grey moustache.

His fish-cakes were a thing to dream of; and their number, or indeed their appearance on the tea-table at all, depended on the humour the old man was in. So, soon or late, all hands spoke Charley fair.

Aft of his galley was the mizzen-mast, on which a sail was hoisted when we trawled. When I first saw this mast, soon after we had started, I made sure it was on fire, for a wreath of smoke was curling from the top. The skipper laughed, and told me that the mast was made of steel, and, being hollow, served also as a chimney to the cabin stove. That was a dodge I had not seen before. Aft of the mizzen-mast was the ship's boat, standing on chocks and lashed securely to the deck; not too securely though, as I was to know later, and a good thing too for me.

That was about all there was to see on deck, except

the trawls; of these one was used daily, and the skipper thoroughly explained to me its make and how it worked. But, with so much to tell of my later adventures, I must not stop to describe it.

I was the tenth hand on the *Early Bird*. "Skip", as, like all the others, I soon learnt to call him, has been introduced already; also Charley, the old cook. Down in the engine-room there was MacGregor, the chief engineer; Sandy, his son, was his assistant, while the "trimmer" was Bob Spratt.

A wild-looking, half-naked fellow was this Bob. I rarely saw him with more clothes on than a pair of trousers and a singlet, both much torn. His nose turned sharply upwards, and two mischievous blue eyes peered out from under a shock head of curly light-brown hair. Upon the *Early Bird* it was a standing joke that Bob was never put to paying a barber—meaning that his hair was always cut in jail. He was received with wonder and congratulations if, at the beginning of a trip, he got on board all safe and unpursued by the police. It was for fighting mostly that he had "done time".

At sea poor Bob was a rare chap to work, willing and cheerful, full of jokes—and, it must be admitted, tricks. He was no favourite with old Charley, being a thorough tease; but he and I were soon great chums. I sometimes wondered what my stepmother would think of this—or Yeo! It was a curious thing, but when I had been no longer than two nights and days at sea, my mother and her plans for me, Yeo, Sylvester & Ashford, came to seem quite far-off things of a past

time, with which I was to have no more concern. Nor, indeed, was I for some time to come—but I am getting on too fast again.

The other men on board were four. There was the mate, Dick Vinnicombe, a rather quiet chap. Ned Trout, the bos'n, was a very smart young man who followed trawling in the winter only, when the yachts on which he worked all summer were laid up; he had a host of interesting things to tell me of crack racing boats. Last came Sam Williams and George Pridham, two deck hands. The mate and bos'n got a slightly higher rate of pay than the two deck hands; but in other ways all worked together, and all wore the same rough clothes—the skipper included. Brass buttons and smart uniforms were quite unknown upon the *Early Bird*.

I was uncommonly sick before we had been three hours out; for, as I said before, there was a north-east wind behind us as we ran down Channel, a high sea was running, and the trawler pitched tremendously. Even by tea-time I was far from ready for the fish-cakes that the cook had made; a little later I was glad to creep down to my cabin, and, after getting a black eye and sundry bruises from a fall as I undressed, climb into bed. The skipper could not have been kinder had he been my nurse. He saw me tucked up snugly, and next morning climbed down early with an apple and a cup of tea. An apple was a famous thing for sea-sick boys, he said; and certainly I did feel better after eating it.

It blew hard all that day and through the night;

but the next morning the wind moderated and the sea went down. Soon I was out on deck and had found my sea-legs and a healthy appetite. And I began to taste the pleasures of the sea-life I had hankered after so long.

The little ship was heaven to me—the free-and-easy life, the roll and glitter of the sea, the company of sailor-men. I went to bed when I liked, rose when I liked; turning in often after midnight, and yet fresh and up again six hours later. For soon the sky grew cloudless, and each morning I was roused by the bright sunshine pouring through the port-hole opposite my bunk. Then, slipping on my jacket and a pair of trousers, I would scramble up to the wheel-house, there to join the steersman and look-out. And presently the latter would slip round to Charley's galley, coming back with bread-and-butter, biscuits, cups of steaming fragrant cocoa for the day's first meal.

We lived like fighting-cocks. Bacon or fish for breakfast; a hot joint—the meat kept fresh upon the ice—for dinner at midday, with vegetables and an apple pudding or jam turnover; with hot-pot, fish, or Irish stew for tea at seven. And in between these meals there was a light lunch at eleven, tea and bread-and-butter in the afternoon, and something late at night.

At first we hauled the trawl at six-hour intervals; at sunrise, noon, an hour before tea, and again at midnight, when our gas-lamps threw a strange weird light on deck and on the sea around. Then for some days we had to haul still oftener; for the catches, which

had been quite good from the beginning of our trawling, grew to be too large for the great net to hold if it was towed six hours. I had brought luck on board, the skipper said.

So work went forward night and day, with thumping catches at each haul. In six days' fishing we had taken more than trawlers sometimes brought to port after being out a fortnight or three weeks. Daily the skipper grew more jovial; he was always singing in his rich strong voice, and presently his thoughts turned towards a little holiday.

It was a thing well understood that trawlers should not touch at any port while on a trip, unless in case of serious illness, or some accident among the crew. But when good catches were brought home to Plymouth Sound, questions were not often asked; and I had heard the skipper talk of afternoons ashore at little fishing-towns in Western Ireland, with gay doings at the public-house. Now, at the end of our first week at sea, we were a few miles only from the coast of Portugal; the skipper said it was a pity for me not to see a foreign country while I had the chance, and so one afternoon he headed for the shore.

We ran into a little bay, with a small village climbing up the hill above it, and cast anchor half a mile from land. There was a boat, with a man fishing from it, not far off; and on being hailed, he came alongside and agreed to put the skipper and a few of us ashore. Our own boat was not easy to make use of, there being no good place from which to lower it, and no hoisting-tackle on the mizzen-mast.

It was decided that the shore-going party should include the skipper and myself; Charley the cook, who was not keen to go, but was pressed in by Skip as being well acquainted with a large variety of foreign ports; Sandy MacGregor from the engine-room; with Ned Trout, the bos'n, and Sam Williams, one of the deck hands. Bob Spratt begged hard to join us, but the skipper would have none of him.

"No, no, my son," he said; "you'm all right in your engine-room and bunkers; once you got ashore, who'd bring you off? You might start scrapping wi' the Portuguese." So as we pulled ashore Bob watched us sadly from the trawler's rail.

There was not much to see in the small village, although what there was was wholly new to me, and I could have stared for hours at the quaintly-painted houses; at the swarthy red-capped fishermen who squatted on the ground outside them, smoking cigarettes and mending nets; and at the gaudy dresses of the dark-eyed women who wore heavy ear-rings in their ears. But for a sailorman ashore the nearest public-house is generally the goal; and presently we found one about half-way up the hill.

The smell that issued from it when the door was opened nearly knocked me down.

"Garlic," the skipper told me; "these poor beggars lives on little else."

We went into a large, low-roofed, very dirty kitchen, and sat down. The skipper had me served with some white wine, mild and pleasant tasting; he and the men found brandy better to their taste. The host, a hunch-

back, was one-eyed, and had the filthiest face and hands I ever saw.

After about an hour Skip got up and looked out seaward from the door.

"Tide's running out a trifle faster than I reckoned on," he said; "we must be off or else we'll have the *Early Bird* aground. Here, Charley, ask this dirty beggar what's to pay."

Immediately a serious difficulty came to light. The one-eyed landlord utterly declined the English silver which the skipper offered him—shillings, two-shilling pieces, and half-crowns alike he shook his head at, evidently wanting something else. Charley, appealed to for an explanation, was for a few moments puzzled, but soon succeeded in getting at the meaning of the innkeeper's excited jabber and gesticulation.

"He says he can't take English silver, but wants gold; he'll give you change."

"Not much, he won't," replied the skipper with great decision; "what does he suppose I'm going to do with his dirty Portuguese dibs as change? If he won't take good shillings and half-crowns with the Queen's head on 'em, why he can go without, that's all." With that he made a movement towards the door; seeing which the hunchback raised a frightful wail.

Things seemed at a deadlock. Two or three men had gathered in the kitchen, there were more outside the inn, and I began to wonder how things would turn out, when old Charley hit upon a settlement which seemed satisfactory to both sides. With the help of much gesticulation between himself and the

innkeeper, he managed to discover that the village had run short of fish; its boats had had bad catches during several days. So, if the English vessel would supply a little, it would pay our score.

It took ten minutes more before the terms were settled, but in time the thing was done. Seven big hake—their size determined between Charley and the innkeeper by means of outstretched arms—were to be given.

This being arranged, Skip not unnaturally proposed to send the fish back by the man who rowed us to the trawler; but again this did not suit. The host insisted upon having his seven fish in hand before we left.

"The dirty dago!" cried the skipper, in great anger at this want of confidence in British honesty, and would, I think, have broken the negotiation off, had it not been for his anxiety about the *Early Bird*. Moreover, Charley put his hand upon his arm.

"Best have no trouble, Skip; we've got the boy with us, you know, and these chaps' knives are not far off, we may be sure," I heard him say. "You write Dick Vinnicombe an order for the fish and let's clear out."

So, seating himself at the filthy table, and choking down his indignation, the skipper tore a leaf of paper from the little pocket-book in which he kept his "tally" of fish caught each haul, and scrawled an order to the mate. For half an hour more we had to kick our heels.

But presently our messenger came panting up the hill with a large fish in either hand, while two

companions followed close behind him with others.

"Ze mate say' zat you 'urry up," this man said to the skipper, as he handed the fish over to the one-eyed host.

We did not need the warning, but raced down the hill and tumbled hurriedly into the boat. There was indeed no time to lose; the tide was running out, the bay was shoaling rapidly, and in another quarter of an hour the ship might very well have gone aground. But as it was we got clear off all right.

Then, as we sat at tea, the skipper, now serene and cheerful, said:

"Well, boys, we didn't do so bad for seven fish."

Dick looked up from his plate of Irish stew.

"Seven fish! How's that? I gave that fellow seventeen."

The skipper stared, for Dick was not a man for giving things away without good cause.

"Why, what the dickens for, Dick? Didn't I write seven, just as plain as need to be?"

"See for yourself then, Skip," replied the mate, tossing the piece of paper across the table.

The skipper read it with growing anger in his eye.

"Just like a dago!" he exclaimed. I peeped over his shoulder from my place beside him.

He had put the figure "7", perhaps that the inn-keeper might see it for himself and understand that he would have fair play. The host, quite plainly a shrewd man, had noticed that the skipper's writing was a little wide apart. He had popped in a "1" before the "7" and had thus secured ten extra fish.

The laugh was clearly against the skipper and we all joined in; but it was best rubbed home by Bob.

“ There you are, Skip,” he cried; “ that comes o’ leaving me behind, you see. You’m like a child among they dagoes. Why; they just sees you coming and they goes and does you in the eye! You’ll take me with you next time, perhaps, now you’ve learnt better, and *I’ll* see as you’re brought back all safe.”

CHAPTER III

The Storm

That was my first experience of the Portuguese; but two days later we fell in with them again, and our second adventure was rather less amusing. In fact it looked at one time as though it might have a serious ending.

It was a fine warm sunny afternoon, and we were steaming slowly south with the trawl down. The ship was very quiet, as was usual at that time of day. I had been up at midnight seeing the trawl got in, and again at five that morning when the watch had called me out of bed to see a distant liner pass. Now I was resting in my bunk. The skipper, too, was lying down, as were all hands except those in the engine-room, the helmsman and look-out, and Charley, whom I could hear pottering about in his galley.

I had been reading, but was just dozing off to sleep when, turning towards the port-hole at my side, I caught sight of what roused me at once and effectually; ten or a dozen little brown-sailed fishing-boats not half a mile away. While I lay watching them, all of a sudden there were signs of great excitement in the



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little fleet. The noise of shouting came across the quiet sea; figures on board the boats could be seen gesticulating; and in a few minutes, while I was still watching, the whole fleet bore down upon the *Early Bird*.

I sprang out of my bunk and ran up the companion-ladder in hot haste, to get a better view of anything that might be going on. In passing from the chart-room to the wheel-house I was just in time to overhear these words from Ned Trout, who was at the wheel:

“ Best go and rouse up Skip.”

Pridham, who was look-out man, slipped through the door at once and hurried to the forecastle, where Skip was lying down. He often rested there in preference to the couch in his own cabin, or the berth leading off the general cabin, where, upon this trip, he slept; he said the forecastle was cooler, as indeed it was.

Some of the boats were now no more than a short hundred yards away, and from them came the noise of many voices, clearly in no very friendly tone. Men were standing up in the boats, gesticulating, shaking their fists, and throwing up their arms in a state of wild excitement. It was quite clear this was not a friendly call.

There was but little time to wonder as to what could be the meaning of the row. The skipper, freshly roused from sleep, yawning, with his hair all tumbled, came out from the forecastle doorway. He gave one look across the rail, then turning back a step, he shouted to the hands inside:

“Rouse up, boys; what’s all this?”

Could it be piracy? I asked myself; and were we back in the days of the wild stirring sea-tales that I loved to read? But no, these were modern times, in which nothing exciting ever happened.

Something, however, it was clear, *was* going to happen, and that at once. Three or four boats were by this time not more than half a dozen yards away, and their crews—two or three men in each—were addressing the skipper and the trawler generally in tones of violent anger, though of course not a single word of what they said had any meaning we could understand.

All hands excepting Trout—still at the wheel—now clustered round the skipper at the starboard rail, awaiting what was to come next.

“Well, what’s the matter?” roared the skipper in his hearty voice; “what’s all this row about?”

A babel of voices answered, shouting we knew not what. The crews raved, stamped, gesticulated in a perfect fury quite incomprehensible to us. I did not quite know whether to be amused or frightened; but the skipper, leaning his great arms upon the rail, just laughed.

That seemed to “put the lid on it”, as people say to-day. Instantly three or four of the boats, paddled by an oar at the stern, made for the trawler’s side, came close up, and their crews tried to grasp the rail. One man succeeded and was clambering upon deck, one leg half over, when the skipper seized him by one arm and jerked him back.

"I don't know what they're after, but chaps don't come into my ship uninvited," he exclaimed, his jolly face losing its smile suddenly; "sheer off, the lot of you."

But the man thrown down leaped for the rail again, and from the other boats more were now scrambling up.

"Knives, Skip," said Williams suddenly in a low tone, and pointing with his hand.

And, sure enough, more than one of our excited visitors had drawn a knife from belt or pocket, and was brandishing it with a furious air. Things were beginning to look serious now. Charley had come out from his galley; that made six for the defence, including me—a boy. A dozen men were now alongside of the trawler, each struggling to get across the rail, and other boats were drawing near.

I felt the skipper's hand upon my shoulder.

"Hurry, Stephen; call up Mac and Bob and Sandy; tell 'em to bring fire-bars along."

I dashed in through the galley, bawled down the companion to the engine-room:

"Mac, come on deck; the skipper wants you quickly—you and Bob and Sandy; and bring fire-bars."

There was a rush of heavy feet on the companion; all three men below had heard the noise around us, and they waited for no second invitation to learn what was going on.

Bob was the first on deck, the light of battle in his eyes, a heavy fire-bar in his right hand. Just opposite the galley entrance two brown hands were visible upon

the rail, and a dark red-capped head rose into sight behind them as their owner scrambled up. With a howl of delight Bob swung his weapon and the heavy bar descended on one hand. Promptly the head dropped back with a loud yell of pain.

Dour at all times, old Mac's face was grimmer than I had yet seen it as he followed close upon Bob's heels. He took in the situation at a glance; saw a Portuguese swing himself over the rail and make for the group about the skipper, drawing a long knife as he ran. Mac's fist, big as a leg of mutton, hard as one of his own engine-pistons, shot out and took the man behind the ear. The fellow dropped on deck as if he had been shot. A moment later Mac had swept him up in his great arms, had swung him to the rail and hurled him overboard, taking sure aim at two men standing in a boat below. The three went down together in a struggling heap.

The skipper and the hands about him had meanwhile been busy farther forward; help from the engine-room soon settled the affair. I don't suppose two minutes had gone by since my first shout down the companion till the last of our invaders, terror-stricken at the savage-looking, coal-grimed faces of the engineers, had dropped into their boats and made all speed to put a distance between the trawler and themselves. The *Early Bird* was clear again and not a single man of us was hurt.

Bob's love of fighting made him long for something more. He dived again into the engine-room, dashed up with two huge lumps of coal, and was about to

hurl them at the heads in a retreating boat when the skipper intervened.

"No, no," he cried, holding Bob's arm in his iron grip; "enough's enough; they'm fairly beat. But dalled if I can tell what they were after. Never once have I had any row upon this coast before."

And he was very sore upon the subject all the afternoon. That he should be attacked so causelessly—or so it seemed—aroused his indignation to the highest pitch.

"Haven't us always paid, and paid dalled handsomely, whenever us have gone ashore and had a drink?" he kept appealing to the crew. "The dirty dagoes, to set on a ship like that."

But when we hauled the trawl that evening we got ample explanation of the fury of the fishermen.

"Comes light this time, I'm feared," said Williams, as the net came slowly in.

"The boards have fouled, I'm thinking," put in Trout.

And, sure enough, when the boards came in sight, they were seen to be drawn half-way together across the mouth of the trawl, entangled in a torn and tattered strip of fine-meshed net in which some small fish glittered here and there.

"A sardine net! We've fouled it; that's what all their jabber meant," exclaimed the mate.

The kindly skipper's anger vanished in a moment, and he seemed to have no other feeling than remorse for the damage we had unwittingly done.

"Pore beggars," he kept on repeating, "if I'd

known, they should have had their pick from our fish-boxes and been welcome, till I'd made it up to 'em. But why the dickens couldn't they just say right out what was amiss, instead of raving there like madmen, going for us bald-headed like they did? 'Tain't likely as a man'll stand a knife shoved in his face."

The following day the *Early Bird* turned northward, making at full speed for Plymouth Sound. The fish-boxes were full, the ice-hold almost empty, and it needed but good prices when we came to port to make the trip almost a record, or at least the best that Skip had had for many months.

The very afternoon that he turned homeward came a change of weather which was destined to mean much to me.

"Glass falling, Stephen boy," the skipper said, tapping the barometer in the chartroom; "we'm going to have a blow."

I did not care. I had been ill at starting, in the rough and tumble of the Channel, and I thought I knew the worst of that.

Signs of the coming change of weather grew more evident the following day. Long strips of cloud blew up across the sky, the wind got round to the south-west, and the sun set that evening in a mass of angry-looking wrack. There was, too, a long oily-looking swell upon the sea; but it was still comparatively calm when I turned in at half-past ten that night.

I woke in darkness, sick and dizzy, with the sound of many mingled noises in my ears. The ship was

pitching wildly, with, at intervals, a heavy roll. Through the bunk port-hole I could see the outside darkness, broken for a moment by the gleam of raging white-capped waves. The gale blew with one long, steady, and unceasing howl. On deck there was the thud of breaking seas, the splash and swish of spray and wash, the constant heavy clanging of the scupper doors as they swung open and then shut; while from below there came the labouring of the engines, and at times, when the trawler's bow pitched downwards, the wild racing of the screw.

I slid out of my bunk; the trawler, lifting her bows high at the same instant, flung me with a crash across the room. Dazed, bruised, and giddy I got slowly to my feet, clutched at the wooden steps of the companion-ladder, and held on. There came no lull. Now the ship dived forward, and now tossed her whale-backed bow so high it seemed as though she must fall backward like a rearing horse. At times she gave a heavy roll when struck by some cross sea.

I don't know how at last I scrambled up the ladder, which seemed bent on throwing me off; but somehow I passed through the hatchway, crept into the chart-room, and, waiting for a favourable moment, turned the handle of the wheel-house door, and was shot forward nearly on my head as the ship reared again.

Williams and Trout were at the wheel. The skipper, one hand holding tight to the brass rail inside the wheel-house, and the other held above his eyes, watched through the open window before which he stood. He

raised it every quarter of a minute to shut out the cloud of drenching spray that flew past as waves broke on the forecastle-head and sheets of water swept the deck; but even as it was the men and he were standing ankle-deep.

"Better have kept below, my sonny," he said, seeing me; "are ye sick?"

I shook my head; I felt too dazed and startled to be really ill.

"Hold on to something then, or you'll get hurt."

I squatted down upon the coaming of the doorway leading to the chartroom, and sat looking on. The faces of the men were set, and I could judge that they had all their work cut out to steer.

"Look out," was all the skipper said from time to time; and after each such warning came a shock that made the trawler shudder and sent tons of water sweeping down her deck. Often she plunged her bows so deeply that I held my breath, hardly believing she could rise again; but still she came up bravely, shaking off her burden with loud clanging of the scupper doors. Well might the skipper love her for a good sea-boat.

It was just four o'clock when I had wakened, and for two hours I sat crouched upon the coaming, with my eyes on the strained faces of the men. In the dim-glimmering lamp, fixed in the wheel-house roof, the oil surged to and fro and round and round.

Day came at last, and Dick and Pridham, in their yellow oilskins, streaming water, made their way from the forecastle for their "trick". Ned managed to get

aft to Charley's galley, coming back with bread, cold meat, and a few drops of cocoa washing at the bottom of enamelled mugs. And so we ate our breakfast, while the *Early Bird* still plunged and wallowed her way homewards through the raging wind and sea.

Through that day and the following night the gale blew hard from the south-west, and I could judge a little of what winter work on board a trawler must be like. It would have been impossible to shoot the trawl had we intended doing so, which was not the case.

It seemed we were not to get off wholly free from accident this trip. The skipper, Trout, and I were in the wheel-house just at dusk that evening when we saw Sam Williams leave the fore-castle to come and take his trick. Just as he did so, the ship plunged heavily, and a great mass of solid water poured from the fore-castle-head and swept right aft. Sam had his back to it and heard the skipper's warning cry too late. The torrent caught him like a feather in its grip and hurled him aft. He came with a great crash against the iron framing of the winch, and lay there motionless and doubled up.

The skipper had whipped out and was beside him the next moment, and I followed him as fast as I could go. Sam was half conscious, groaning faintly, with the blood flowing from a deep cut on his head. Our shouts for help brought Charley from the galley, and the others quickly came. Someone was sent below for brandy, while the rest got Sam into the fore-castle and laid him in his bunk.

Stephen Goes to Sea

Besides the cut upon his head, which was soon bound up by the skipper in a way that showed that he was well accustomed to such work, poor Sam was badly bruised and strained, and it was clear he would be helpless for the rest of the trip. We being accordingly a hand short, I now tried to make myself as useful as I could; but though I had my sea-legs pretty well by this time, yet the skipper would not let me venture overmuch on deck, and I could see that he was nervous of some accident to me. It was as much as he would do to let me run upon the briefest errand, from the wheel-house to the cabin or the forecastle, alone.

The wind went down a little by the second morning of the gale, but the sea still ran very high, and the trawler pitched tremendously. She was, of course, extremely heavy forward, her fish-hold being full, and she would hardly rise at all to heavy seas, nosing right through them, shipping a lot of water on her way. She was a grand sea-boat and shook off the water like a duck; but still, seas often swept her deck knee-deep and more from stem to stern.

To say that I was wholly free from fear through that great gale would not be true. It was impossible that, on a boy who had never been out of sight of land, the furious weather should make no impression. Frightened, accordingly, I sometimes was, especially when the ship's bows went extra deep. But through my fright there ran a sort of exultation; this wild weather was a good apprenticeship to a sea-life.

So any nervousness I may at times have felt, I did

my best to hide, and not without success. I lent a hand at everything I could; and, when there seemed no other way in which I could be useful, would look in on Sam, lying bruised and helpless in the fore-castle.

I was sitting with him after dark upon the evening following that on which the accident occurred. The skipper and all hands except the watch were in the cabin having tea; at my suggestion mine had been brought up with Sam's that I might keep him company.

We had about finished, and I saw Sam eye his empty plate.

"Have a bit more, Sam? I'll soon go and fetch some up."

"Well, I do reckon I could put away another o' old Charley's cakes," he replied. "But we'd better wait till one o' them comes for'ard; 'tain't too safe for you out there on deck."

But I was piqued by this imputation on my sea-legs, and jumped up at once to go.

"Well then, be careful, now; watch out your chance along the foredeck, and be sure to hold on tight along the engine casing, 'cos it's there the seas do gather force." This was Sam's caution as I passed outside the door. How little he or I thought they were the last words I was to hear on board the *Early Bird*.

Outside on deck the night had fallen very dark; the sea was still high and the wind seemed to be getting up. I could see, up in the wheel-house, the figure of the look-out at the window, but he gave no sign of seeing me; side-lights were burning, but the deck itself was dark.

I held on for a moment at the doorway of the fore-castle, then took a run that brought me to the mast. The trawler was still pitching wildly; but by this time I had learnt to judge her movements and to watch my opportunity. Sam was quite right about the gangway between rail and engine casing being the dangerous place; for there, compressed into a narrow channel, the great seas that broke across the deck ran swift and deep.

A deluge of cold spray fell on me as the trawler's bow dipped down. She rose so slowly that I judged that there was time for me to reach the safety of the galley well before the water she would ship could reach the deck. But, as I started for the galley door, I took a backward glance.

I saw a wall of water sweep across the whale-back, heard the thunder of its breaking upon deck. Then in an instant it was on me, over me, had whirled me from my feet. I was borne swiftly past the dim light of the galley doorway and carried towards the stern.

I tried to give a shout for help, but a great flood of water filled my mouth and throat. The overwhelming force still swept me on. I wondered where I should bring up—against the mizzen-mast, or perhaps the boat? But no; it was more likely that I should be flung against the stern-rail, badly hurt, perhaps killed.

It seemed an age before the force which swept me off my feet had ceased to act, and left me conscious that I was without support. I felt with my feet for

the deck, but could find nothing upon which to stand; flung out my arms on either side to grasp the rail, but still without success. Then slowly, as it seemed, and rather with a feeling of intense surprise than terror, I knew what had happened. I was overboard.

CHAPTER IV

Adrift

I think I have both heard and read that drowning persons live, in a few moments, all their previous life. This may be true, perhaps, in some cases, but it was not so with me. My thoughts were of the present, not the past; and I realized in an instant, with a clearness that surprises me as I look back upon it, that I could have little or no hope of rescue from the *Early Bird*.

No one would know that I was overboard. Down in the cabin they would think that I was still with Sam; while he would think the skipper was keeping me below.

Yet, strange as it may seem, I had no feeling of despair. I did not mean to drown. I was a strong swimmer; how I thanked my stars that I had been brought up beside that rocky pool on Sheldon beach!

Instinctively, as soon as I had realized the truth, I had slipped off my heavy oilskin coat and kicked away my boots. Freed from their dragging weight, and not much impeded by my jersey, trousers, underwear, and socks, I now swam gently, using little more exertion than sufficed to keep me on the surface. True, I had never before found myself swimming in so high

a sea; but I had often swum in very choppy water, and this was but little worse. I took no thought of the direction that I might be taking, merely aiming to keep myself afloat.

I looked out for the trawler; but, one instant low in a deep hollow, and the next borne high upon a foam-topped wave, I saw no sign of her—no light. Strange as it well may seem, that did not greatly trouble me. I felt so strong, so able to keep on indefinitely swimming, that I fancied I could keep afloat for hours. And by that time something—what, I knew not—must turn up.

How long I was so swimming it is quite impossible for me to say. I swam quite slowly, changed my stroke from time to time, floated a little now and then for rest, made use of every means I knew for husbanding my strength.

I had been going on, it seemed to me for hours, when quite suddenly I felt that I was very tired. As I realized the truth my heart stood still. I was to drown, then; this voyage, which I had fancied the beginning, was to be the end of my sea-life.

For a few moments I half lost my self-control and struck out frantically, gasping, sobbing, with the fear of death upon my heart. But presently, with a strong effort of my will, I grew comparatively calm again, and had resumed my slow deliberate strokes. No one was there to see me; all the same I meant to die as bravely as I could.

As I was swimming on my side, and very slowly, I swept up the broad smooth slope of a great sea, and

was just plunging down its farther side when suddenly I felt a blow on my right shoulder and instinctively put out my hand. It fell on something solid, smooth, and rounded, something that slipped away from me before my touch, but not before I recognized it by its shape to be an upturned boat.

And with this strange unlooked-for chance of life there also came to me the knowledge that it must be now or never; that I could not swim unaided for two minutes longer; and that if I meant to live I must secure that boat. All this flashed through my mind in one brief instant, while I slid my hand down the boat's side and grasped the gunwale under water. Once she escaped me altogether, and I swam with frantic desperation for some seconds till I struck against her again. I gripped the gunwale and held on. Now if I could but right her, scramble in! Could I but even get astride her as she was!

The latter notion was impossible to carry out. The keel was almost flat, and I could get no hold by which to scramble up. So I turned all my hopes towards righting her, and then began a struggle which, to me, seemed ages long. In sober truth it may have lasted perhaps five minutes, or at most for ten; for, looking back, I feel quite sure my strength would not have held out longer. All this went on in blackest darkness; not a star was in the sky.

On the boat's side I could obtain no hold; but, holding to her gunwale under water, I edged round until I reached the stern. There I could rest my fingers—very insecurely, it is true—upon the gudgeons

for the rudder pintles, and in this way gain some slight support. But more I could not do; try as I would I could not get the boat to right; I was afraid to put forth too much force, for fear of letting go my hold and losing her altogether. So I could do little but hold on.

My weight upon the stern had, I suppose, brought the boat round with head to sea. As each sea met us, up would go her bow, her stern dipped under water, and I often almost lost my hold; the gudgeons were too small for me to get my fingers firmly in. To-day I cannot understand how we contrived to keep together, but we did.

And then, quite suddenly, there happened that which I had tried in vain to bring about. The boat's bow rose once more; I felt her slipping from me, plunged both arms down, caught at her gunwale with my hands, and held on tight. Then slowly I was swept head-downwards through the water—downwards, ever downwards, but still gripping for dear life. There was a crash behind me, my head rose at last into free air. I found myself still holding on, my arms stretched out above my head. The boat had been caught bows on by a heavy sea, thrown over backwards, and now floated right side up.

Still clutching her with the numbed, aching fingers of one hand, I cautiously let go the other and turned round. Yes, she was right side up and floating, with me holding to the stern.

It was as much as both my weary arms could do to raise my body, as they had so often done in Denmouth

harbour, draw me up till I could drag first one leg, then the other over, and fall limply in. I went down over head in water, realized sharply that the boat must be half full or more, and that at any moment, if not quickly lightened, she would sink.

With frantic haste I set to work to bale her—using my hands, for I had nothing else. I worked on desperately, not ceasing for a moment till I felt her ride less heavily upon the seas. I could see nothing, but could feel the water in her getting lower, feel her take the rollers with a greater ease.

Then I sat down, my back against the stern-post, trimming her as best I could. And in another minute, sitting though I was in several inches of salt water, I fell fast asleep.

It was broad daylight, perhaps an hour after dawn, when I awoke and realized my plight. The boat now rode less lightly, and I saw at once there was more water in her than when I had gone to sleep. I set to work once more to bale.

Now, in the daylight, I could recognize the boat as being the trawler's, and I guessed how she had been washed overboard. Only a day or two before, the skipper noticed that the ropes by which she was lashed down upon the chocks were badly chafed, and had remarked that she must have new ones; and the new ropes would doubtless have been fitted had not Sam's accident occurred and put the matter from the skipper's mind.

No doubt the boat and I had both gone overboard together. What a miracle that I should meet her in

the darkness after swimming for so long alone! Had she, I wondered, been quite near me all the time that I was in the water, or had some set of tide or current chanced to bring us together? Anyway, here she was, and I sat in her with a greatly lightened heart.

The sea, although it still ran pretty high, had gone down noticeably while I slept. Now, lightened by my vigorous baling, the boat rose easily to every wave, and, for the moment, I seemed fairly safe. But I was wholly helpless; there was neither oar nor rudder—nothing but the boat herself. Nor was there anything that I could do to keep her head to sea; no means that I could use for making a sea-anchor; nothing for it but to sit there, keeping a look-out.

Quiet enough I sat, but as to keeping a look-out I altogether failed. Worn out by my long swim and the struggle to secure the boat, hungry and thirsty, my limbs aching, utterly exhausted, I suppose that I soon fell asleep once more. I woke at intervals; once, I remember, about noon, for through the clouds, which were now thinning, I could see the sun. And then I slept again—to wake up suddenly with a loud booming in my ears.

One look ahead drove sleep away. Barely a quarter of a mile off a liner, with a white crest of foam before her bows, was coming down on me full speed. As I gazed at her I could hear a bell ring sharply, heard an order given, saw a boat swing outwards from the davits on her topmost deck. It dropped down swiftly and met the water with a spirt of spray. I waved one hand to greet her as the oars dipped all together and

she rose and fell upon her way. And then I seemed to lose all strength to think or act.

It was in dazed half-consciousness that I sat watching while the boat came up alongside, and a smart figure, in bright buttons and gold-braided uniform, leaned over and lifted me from where I sat. As in a dream I saw the kindly curious faces of the men, who rested for an instant on their oars. Almost immediately we were alongside the great steamer, with more faces looking down upon us from the rail. The falls were hooked, the big hull slipped away beneath us as the boat rose to the davits. Once again I heard a bell ring out; was lifted down and set upon my feet among a little group of officers who crowded round. Then, as it seemed from a great distance, a soft voice said: "Look out, Mr. White, the little fellow's fainting," and I knew no more.

CHAPTER V

The “Ludlow Castle”

Some minutes later, as it seemed to me—though it was really eighteen hours—I awoke again to find myself in a cabin rather larger than the one which I had occupied upon the *Early Bird*. Sunlight streamed through two port-holes, shining upon handsome fittings, glittering metalwork, and on the spotless bed in which I lay. I stirred a little, and a tall, broad-shouldered man, who stood beside a port-hole with his back to me, turned round at once, showing as he did so a large, ruddy, and good-tempered-looking face.

“Well, my young shipwrecked mariner, and how are you by now?”

“All right, sir, thank you; but where am I, please?”

The liner’s doctor, as I later found he was, came over to the bunk, drew a large gold watch from his pocket, took my wrist between his cool firm fingers, and began to take my pulse.

“Yes, that’s all right,” he murmured, after a few moments’ silence, then went on to answer me.

“Where are you? Why, you’re in the sick-bay of the *Ludlow Castle*, outward bound for Grand Canary and South Africa,” he said.

“ Did you pick up the boat, then?” I inquired.

“ We did, and none too soon; you’d had about as much of boating as was good for you, young man. Moreover, there was a nasty cross-sea getting up, and you were shipping water pretty fast. You’ve had a close call, I can tell you that. And now lie quiet a few minutes while I go and call the skipper, for he wants to have a look at you.”

He left the cabin, and in about ten minutes’ time returned in company with a short fair-haired man, clean-shaven save for a close-cropped moustache. His face had keen but kind blue eyes; and when he spoke it was with a softer voice than I have ever heard before from a man’s lips. Behind his back men called him “ Gentle Jenny ”, on account of that soft voice; but woe betide the man who should in any way presume on it.

“ Well, little chap,” said Captain Custance, “ you have had a very narrow squeak. Do you feel well enough to tell us all about yourself, and how it is we find you cruising in an open boat some fifty miles from land?”

I answered that I was quite well enough to talk. He took a little folding camp-stool that was hanging in a corner of the cabin, opened it, and sat down by my side, while the tall doctor, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, leaned against the wall. To them I told my tale from the beginning. Both listened to me silently for the most part, though one or other asked a question here and there. When I had finished with the righting of the boat, my scrambling into it,

and what followed, the big doctor heaved a heavy sigh and exclaimed:

"Well, of all the lucky young beggars!"

"Yes, you've a great deal to be thankful for, my lad," said the captain; "it was a thousand chances against one that you should come across the boat at all, and I should say a million to one against her righting in the way you tell us that she did. I don't know that I ever heard of such a case before. A boat will often right herself, but the great wonder is she did not fill and sink. Well, now that you are safe on board us, what do you propose to do? We're outward bound, you see."

"I suppose you couldn't put me ashore, sir; and—could you lend me just a little money so that I can get back home?"

The captain drew his hand across his moustache slowly, and I saw his eyes turn towards the doctor with a gleam in them. I could have bitten off my tongue, for I had hardly spoken when I felt that the request had been a silly one. Where did I expect them to set me ashore?

"Well, as to money, we'll take care that you are not sent penniless ashore," the captain answered; "but as to putting you ashore just yet, I'm afraid it can't be done. Just at this moment we are about a hundred and fifty miles from the coast of Spain, and getting farther from land every minute. No, lad, I can't turn off my course; you see, we carry mails and so must not lose any time."

"Couldn't you put me on a vessel going to England, if you meet one, sir?"

"Not very well, I fear; that too would lose some time. Besides, even supposing that we were to meet a ship, and that she were willing to take you, it's ten to one against her being bound for any port that would suit you. No, Stephen—Stephen, did you say your name was?—you must stick to us until we get to Grand Canary, which will be in some five days or less."

"I'm thinking that my father will be very anxious, sir, when Captain Phipps gets home and tells him that I'm lost," I said.

"Yes, I can understand that, and I'm sorry for it; but we can't do anything as yet. I'll cable to my owners from Las Palmas asking them to let your father and the trawler's people know. Then, if another of our boats is there, and homeward bound, as she should be about that time, I might perhaps send you home in her. But otherwise I think you'd better stick to us for the round trip. We go on from the Grand Canary to Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, and shall be back in England in about eight weeks."

Here was the prospect of a voyage indeed. But with it came a thought that troubled me.

"Won't my fare cost a lot of money all that way and back, sir?" I inquired. I knew quite well that cash was not too plentiful at home.

"Quite right to think of that, but we can make things square in some way, I've no doubt. We don't pick up small boys adrift in open boats on every trip. No, I don't think the Castle Company will charge you for your run; and if, when you feel well enough again you like to do some work, I dare say we can set you

back in England with a trifle in your pocket to make up to you for all you have gone through."

"I'd like to work, sir," I replied.

"That's good. Well, we can talk about that later on. Now, Doctor, don't you think a little air on deck would do him good?"

"It would; but not with all the passengers pawing over him and asking him to tell his interesting story fifty times," the big man said.

"I'll see to that. Ring for a steward, Doctor, will you; tell him to rig out the boy in any clothes that can be found to fit him, for I don't suppose his own will be much good again. When he has had some food, and is quite ready, bring him up yourself to me upon the boat-deck—see?" And with a kindly nod to me, the captain went away.

The doctor ordered me a meal and clothes, of which the steward brought me some that proved a decent fit. When I had eaten and was dressed, back came the doctor, led me down a corridor, then up a handsome flight of stairs. Our coming out upon the promenade-deck was the signal for a movement of the passengers from every side. But the big doctor, with a hand pressed firmly on my shoulder, led me through them without once stopping.

"Sorry, he can't stay now; the captain's waiting for him on the boat-deck," was his answer to inquiries.

Once on the boat-deck I was safe from questioning. The little group of officers upon the bridge glanced at me for a moment as I came in sight; but it was now close upon midday and the daily observations were

being made. A sailor brought me a deck-chair and I was left alone.

Towards half-past one another meal was brought me, which, by the captain's orders, I ate in the chart-room. An hour or so later I was called to see the captain in the stateroom of his private suite just aft the bridge. A large black cat was curled up on the couch which occupied one side of the room.

"Well, feeling pretty fit again now, eh?"

"Quite, thank you, sir," I said.

"That's right. Well now, look here, my boy; the doctor and myself have talked you over and have settled what seems best. As I have told you, we can land you nowhere till we get to Grand Canary; even there I think you will do better to go on with us for the whole trip. As I have picked you up I feel responsible for you, and would prefer to keep you with me until I can set you safe in England. I'll cable to our people from Las Palmas, asking them to let your father and the owners of the trawler know that you are safe, so that they will not worry thinking you are drowned. You understand?"

"Yes, sir, and thank you very much."

"Now, understand me; you are not obliged to work on board this ship; but, if you don't, my company might make a claim against your father for your passage, though I don't suppose they would."

"I would much rather work, sir, please," I interposed.

"That's right; I thought you would. Well, then, the purser tells me the stewards are short-handed—

one of them is ill. So you shall help them with the meals in the saloon, and do odd jobs like that. You will be under the chief steward's orders, and he won't work you too hard. You will be fed and have a comfortable berth; when you get back to England I will answer for it that the company will pay you what is fair. Are you quite satisfied with that?"

"Yes, sir, quite satisfied."

"Good; then you'll start work to-morrow morning. Now there's one thing more. Down on the promenade deck are some people thirsting for your blood; in other words, a number of ladies and gentlemen are dying to ask you questions as to your adventures—find out what you did and felt and thought. Now, boy, don't let them make you think yourself a hero; you are just a decent ordinary lad who's had a rather strange adventure and a marvellous escape from death; you should thank God Almighty for it all the days you live. Now you can go down to the promenade-deck; you will soon find out what's waiting for you and will be sick enough of it before you've done. That's all."

The captain was quite right; I was soon sick of it. It was a lady who first spied me, as, feeling not a little shy and nervous, I appeared upon the deck below. She pounced on me at once. A group soon gathered round us; passengers, some frankly eager, some with a more casual air, came flocking from the smokeroom, music-room, and sheltered corners of the deck. The lady who first made me prisoner told me to begin my tale at the beginning; but constant new arrivals kept on interrupting me with questions as to parts which

they had missed, until I hardly knew what I was saying.

The captain need have had no fears about my head being turned. I only wished these people far enough. There was a little lull at tea-time; but no sooner was that over than the game began again. And everybody wanted me to dwell particularly on different points of the affair.

But it was over at last, and the next day I got to work. Just for a day or two some passenger would eye me curiously as I stood handing him a dish of peas or potatoes—for the chief steward had made me vegetable-boy for one section of the saloon. But passengers had hearty appetites on board the *Ludlow Castle*, and I was not asked to tell my tale again at meals. Presently I found myself forgotten, as the captain hinted I should be, and very glad I was.

I do not mean that every passenger had bored me in the way I have described. There were a few "big guns" on board the liner, men to whom my small adventure was no doubt a trifle. One such there was, especially—Sir Alexander Hart.

He sat at the captain's table, and was going out to take up some important post in Africa. He was tall, thin, brown-faced, clean-shaven, with a pair of keen grey eyes. And I asked nothing better than to listen to such fragments of his talk as reached my ears.

I don't suppose he ever guessed what longings he was stirring in the little steward's boy who hovered near the table with his ears wide open to catch snatches of the talk. I think I did my work quite well; at any

rate the chief and second stewards made no complaint; and yet I often did it in a kind of dream. For though, down there in the big ship's saloon, the band playing softly in the gallery above it, I was handing plates and running to and fro for fresh supplies of this and that, in my imagination I was living in the midst of all those tropic glories which Sir Alexander was describing to the young lady at his side.

I wish that he was here to-day to guide my pen; for never have I heard another man whose conversation had such power and skill to paint a life-like picture of the strange sights he had seen. He talked of Singapore; and I, the little steward's boy, saw the motley crowd upon the wharves and in the streets—Chinese, Malays and Indians, English, Germans, men of every race in every kind of dress.

Still more I loved to hear him talk of the interior of Malaya, that strange land which, comparatively speaking, was then little known. For then I seemed to see its rivers; sometimes slow-flowing, brown, and muddy, with the sleeping crocodiles upon their banks; and sometimes clear and green, swift-running, with the sunlight glancing through the overhanging arch of trees.

It is good proof, I think, of how engrained the taste for wandering must have been in me, that the great peril which I had so recently gone through had left but a very faint impression on my mind. I had been frightened at the time, undoubtedly, had thought of home and wished myself in safety there. But now all that was past, and I began to think of my return

with some regret. My stepmother would very likely think I should be cured of sea-going thoughts for life, that I should be quite willing now to settle down to work on land. For that I was not willing, and the conversation of Sir Alexander Hart and other passengers on board the *Ludlow Castle* daily filled my mind with new desires, conjured up fresh pictures, better and far more enticing than the ones which I had so far got from books alone. I longed to see the world of which they talked.

I was not destined to see much of it as yet, it seemed; for at Las Palmas I was not allowed to go ashore. The tall palms, quaintly painted flat-roofed houses, the vast heaps of drifted golden sand—I saw them from the ship, but that was all. We anchored in the roadstead early in the morning, left again at three that afternoon, and I was busy all the time; for many business men and residents came off from shore to share the liner's hospitable lunch and gossip with the officers.

Both here and later, at Cape Town and Port Elizabeth, it was quite clear that I was not to go back empty-handed from my trip. I did the liner's passengers injustice when I said that they entirely forgot me after their first curiosity was satisfied. The greater number, gentlemen and ladies both, found opportunity to say good-bye to me when they were leaving, wished me luck, and then put something—silver generally, but sometimes half a sovereign—in my hand. Among the extra generous of these kindly people was Sir Alexander Hart. Except for one or two short questions as to my adventure, he had barely spoken to me while upon the

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ship; but at Cape Town, where he was leaving her, he sought me out before he went ashore.

"Good-bye, my boy, and all good luck to you," he said. "You've started rather early with adventures; no one knows where you may end. Keep a cool head and try to do what's right, and you won't come to any serious harm. I've friends in a good many quarters of the world; if ever you meet any of them you may ask them to oblige you for my sake. And if you ever find yourself in the Malay Peninsula, and want to ask a favour from a brown man—well, to say that you know *Tuan* Hart won't do you any harm. Here is a trifle for your pocket, and again 'good luck'."

He shook hands, nodded to me kindly, and then went aft to the accommodation-ladder, leaving me with a sovereign shining in my hand.

CHAPTER VI

The Red-haired Boy

To speak quite frankly, I am getting frightened at the length to which this tale is growing, and should be half inclined to give up altogether the job of telling it, were it not that my eldest boy, though he has heard the story at least fifty times, is bent on seeing it all in print, and will not let me stop. But, if we are to come to what I look on as my real adventures, I must hurry on a little, and cut things shorter here and there.

I saw a little of Cape Town and rather more of Port Elizabeth, for at the latter place the liner stopped some days, it being the end of her outward run.

There I was pretty constantly ashore; for, though we did not lie beside a quay, but anchored in the roadstead half a mile from land, lighters and smaller boats were often going to and fro between the shore and ship. The chief steward let me have one afternoon ashore to see the place, and also I was often sent on errands by the purser or himself. And it was going ashore that brought about the tale I have to tell. For there, two days before we were to leave for home, I came on something that changed all my life.

It was a ship that lay at the North Jetty, and at once,

among the many vessels there, she caught my eye, and I knew her to be something out of the common. She was a sailing-ship, three-masted and square-rigged, with very graceful lines. Her masts struck me as having been cut down, nor, as I found out later, was I wrong in thinking this. A raised poop occupied about one-third of her whole length, and on her main-deck there were one or two small deck-houses.

The ship was a strange mixture; battered and weather-beaten as she was, yet there was an unmistakable look about her which told me that not only had she once been beautiful in every point, but that she still seemed making a last effort to preserve a little—what she could—of such remains of former beauty as were left.

For instance, outside she was painted black, with a narrow green band at the base and top of the rail; but inside the whole rail was panelled and was painted white, as were the masts. Her brass bell shone like gold; so did the bands upon a row of polished wooden fire-buckets that stood below the “break” of the poop. There were a score of little things like that, which told me, boy though I was, that there was someone in that ship who loved her and who tried to keep her as she had been in her prime.

And what that prime had been I knew the moment that I read her name and recognized her graceful figurehead, still painted white as snow and daintily picked out with gold—the *Lady Lucy*. At the sight of those two words a feeling that I cannot well explain came over me and seemed to sweep me off my feet,

just as the real wave had swept me off the *Early Bird*.

For then at once I knew her as being one of the crack Clyde-built China clippers of her day; one of the very last of them, though not by any means the least. It was the *Lady Lucy* that had made so brave a fight for victory in the great race against her famous rival the *Taeping*. Still more, to me, she was the ship in which, as I had often heard, my father had once sailed.

All others of her class had vanished long ago—wrecked, burnt, or broken up—and I had heard my father wonder where she was, and end the question with a sigh. And she, it seemed, was still afloat; battered and scarred, degraded to the level of an ocean tramp, but still alive. And as I stood beside her, looked upon the gallant ship in which my father spent, as he had often told me, some of the best and happiest days of all his life, I realized that this was what I wanted too. I had been happy in the *Early Bird*, and happy in the *Ludlow Castle* in a different way; but now I knew at once that in the *Lady Lucy*, sea-life, as I pictured it at any rate, would be an altogether different thing.

If I could only get on board her, be a member of her crew! Where was she going, I wondered to myself?

I was still gazing at her from the quayside when a boy of pretty much my size, and seemingly about my age, came down the gang-plank and walked off along the quay. He was a snub-nosed boy, with freckles

thick upon his face, and very bright red hair. His hands were thrust into his trousers pockets, and he had a very sulky look.

I did not mind his sulky looks; I wanted to find out about the *Lady Lucy*, and without a moment's hesitation I went after him, and overtook him as he passed through the dock gates and turned off towards the town.

"That's a fine ship of yours," I said; "at least—do you belong to her?"

He stared at me for a moment in seeming astonishment, and then replied:

"Oh, I belong to her all right enough." The words were spoken in a tone that matched the discontented look upon his face.

"I wish I did."

He stared again with evident surprise and curiosity.

"What are you on?" he asked; "a liner, eh?"

I told him I was on the *Ludlow Castle*, and I went on to explain my being there, telling my story in far fewer words than it has taken here. When I had finished he shrugged his shoulders.

"I should have had enough of going to sea if I'd been you. I've had enough of it already, anyway."

"Why, don't you like it?" I inquired with surprise.

"Like it! no, I should jolly well think not. It's the most rotten sort of life."

"What made you go to sea, then?" I asked naturally.

"Dunno; suppose I didn't know what it would be, that's why. Say, where you going?"

"Oh, up-town, anywhere," I answered, and then

added: "come and have some ginger-beer and sweets; I'll stand."

"Don't mind the ginger-beer, but no sweets, thank you; cigarettes for me."

"All right, come on."

I had some money in my pocket and I stood him what he liked. Then I proposed that we should stroll for half an hour down on the sea-wall. I wanted to hear all I could about the ship.

But he was far from being enthusiastic on the subject, and I had to drag the information from him bit by bit. However, he told me that the *Lady Lucy* was owned by a Newcastle firm, and that her present cargo consisted almost entirely of machinery. Part of it, now nearly all unloaded, was for gold-mines in South Africa; the rest was for Penang and the Malay Peninsula. When that had been discharged, the vessel would load tin for home, either at Singapore or at Penang, it was as yet uncertain which.

How my mouth watered as he told me all these things in an indifferent tone! She was going, then, the *Lady Lucy*, all across the Indian Ocean to that Eastern world of which Sir Alexander Hart had talked so much—that country of strange men, strange beasts, strange ways. But what made me so mad was the mere thought that *he* was going in her—this sulky, discontented boy; while I—in two days I should be upon my homeward way, bound perhaps for Sylvester & Ashford's office for my life. I felt that I would give my eyes to be in this boy's shoes. And, even as this thought was in my mind, he spoke again—

almost the first time he had done so, save in answer to the many questions I had asked. Perhaps my generosity—I had been lavish with the ginger-beer and cigarettes—had thawed his heart.

“Look here,” he said suddenly, “you’ll not let on to a soul if I tell you something?”

Of course I swore to secrecy.

“Well, *I’m* not going to Singapore or any other of their beastly places.” The boy looked at me with triumph shining in his little light-blue eyes.

“You aren’t? Why not?”

“Because I’m going to do a bunk.”

“Good Lord!”

“Oh, you may say ‘Good Lord’, but I am jolly well fed up with the whole bally thing. What’s all the use of cleaning and polishing and scrubbing day after day for nothing on a beastly ship like that? If I must work like a slave, at any rate I mean to get well paid for it, and now I’ve got a job worth two of going to sea. I’ve done with the sea.”

“But you will have to go back home to England, won’t you?” I inquired.

“Not me. You see, I’ve got an uncle here in Port Elizabeth, who keeps a general store; he came out many years ago, and has made pots of money at the job. He’s told me more than once that I was a fool to stay at sea, and I can see he’s right. Well, he is opening a new branch up-country, and he wants a boy to send up with the man who’s going to take charge. And so, you see, my uncle’s looking for a chap. He wouldn’t listen if I asked him to go down

and see the skipper of the *Lady Lucy* and try to get me off; and I don't suppose the skipper'd listen to him long, either; but if I turn up after the ship has cleared right out, why, he'll perhaps row me for a bit, and that'll be all. He'll take me on all right enough. So that's what I am going to do. There's heaps of money to be made at store-keeping out here."

"What sort of work have you been doing on board the *Lady Lucy*?" I inquired.

"A jolly lot of work," replied the red-haired boy—by this time he had told me that his name was Willie Pritchard—speaking in a very injured tone; "I was a sort of cabin-boy and helped the steward; and then when I'd finished with him they used to set me down to work on deck—polishing brasses and that sort of rot. I shall be jolly glad when I've cleared out, I know. The first mate, Mr. Innes, is just mad about the beastly ship."

"Why, how d'you mean—just mad?"

"Oh, I don't know; he seems to think no end of her; treats her as if she were a sort of baby pet, and he is never satisfied with how a thing is done."

I understood a little of the first mate's feelings, or I thought I did. Here was this lovely vessel going to the corner of the world that I so longed to see; here was this stupid boy who did not know his luck and was about to leave her on the sly. And in another instant I made up my mind and spoke.

"I'll tell you what; I'll go instead of you."

Young Pritchard stared.

"D'you mean to say you *want* to go?" he said.

“ Yes, and what’s more, I’m going.”

“ I don’t see how you can; the captain wouldn’t take you, and you know you’ve promised not to tell of me.”

“ I shall not ask the captain, and I am not going to tell of you. I mean to get on board without being seen.”

“ But how?”

“ Look here; you say the ship will sail to-morrow night. What time?”

“ Two in the morning.”

“ Shall you—should you, I mean, if you were still on board—be up and working then?”

“ No, I should be in bed, I’m pretty sure. The first mate says I’m only in the way when there is any real work going on.”

I could quite well believe it, though I did not say so, but went on:

“ Shall you get off to-morrow evening to say good-bye to this uncle of yours?”

“ Yes, but I’ve got to be on board again by half-past ten.”

“ Then you’d go straight to bed when you get back?”

“ Yes, straight, unless the first mate sent for me.”

“ Then, if I could manage to slip on board at half-past ten instead of you, no one would know about it till the *Lady Lucy* was some hours at sea?”

Pritchard, as I could see, was now beginning to be interested in my scheme.

“ Well, no; I don’t suppose they would,” he admitted.

"Then don't you see," I went on eagerly, "what an advantage that will be for you. If you do not turn up on board at half-past ten you will be missed, and they will very likely send up to your uncle's thinking you are there; or they may come across you somewhere else—they might not, but again they might. But if I take your place, and slip away to bed, it's bound to be all safe for you."

Pritchard did not reply at once. He appeared to be considering this part of my plan from the point of view of his own interests, as I meant he should.

"I'd take good care they didn't catch me, once I got away," he said at last; "still, it might save a little bother with my uncle, perhaps. But, by the by, there's Billy; how d'you mean to get past him?"

"Who's Billy?" I inquired.

Billy, it seemed, was an old sailor on the *Lady Lucy*; he would be about the gangway, noting who went on and off her till she sailed.

"Couldn't you square him for me?" I asked.

"I might; he's always short of money, but he'd want a lot, I expect."

"How much?"

"Dunno; how much'll you give?"

"D'you think he'll do it for a pound? If not I'll give him two."

"My stars, you must be flush!"

As a matter of fact I was pretty "flush". The tips from the passengers in the *Ludlow Castle* who had taken an interest in me and my adventures mounted up to nearly fifteen pounds—more, perhaps, than any

other of the stewards had received. Of this sum, however, I had given ten pounds to the purser to take care of for me, and that was quite out of my reach for any purpose such as I was now planning. But I still had nearly four pounds in my pocket. One pound, or even two, would be well spent in getting safely stowed away on board the *Lady Lucy*.

"But how will you get off from your ship?" Pritchard asked.

"Swim, if I can't get off in any other way," I answered boldly, and I meant it.

My conscience pricked me not a little all this time for what I was about to do, but I shut my ears to its voice. I was a boy, you must remember, nothing more. I could see nothing, think of nothing, but one quite clear fact; that here was this fine vessel, such a one as I most longed to sail in, going in a few hours where I wished to go. I told myself that I should be a fool to miss the chance, and I continued to arrange things with the red-haired boy.

That young gentleman had at first been inclined to pooh-pooh the notion of his being sought on shore, perhaps caught and taken back; but I could see that he was not sorry to find a willing substitute in me. He gave me most minute instructions as to my behaviour when I went on board the following night, or, rather, as to the route I must follow in order to reach safely the small half-deck cabin underneath the poop, in which the steward and he were berthed.

As to my getting past old Billy, who would be on watch beside the gangway, Pritchard now admitted

he had little doubt of that, having himself bribed the old man with five shillings to look the other way while he, Pritchard, carried ashore in two bundles a portion of his belongings. His sea-chest was, of course, out of the question; but he seemed to part from that and his sea-clothes without the least regret. Pritchard was to take an early opportunity—that night if possible, or on the following day—of confiding the project to Billy and securing his connivance. As I went up the gangway in the comparative darkness, I was to say “Here’s your tobacco, Billy,” and at the same time slip a sovereign into his hand. But if the old man had stood out for higher terms he would reply: “See here, lad, where’s the change?” on which, with the air of having forgotten it, I must produce a second pound.

I had talked confidently enough of swimming from the *Ludlow Castle* if I could leave her in no other way; but swimming was a course which I had no desire to pursue unless I was hard pressed. I must just trust to luck. There would be boats and launches going to and coming from the shore till any hour up to midnight, and I must slip off in one of these.

Before I went to bed that night I wrote two letters—one to my father, the other to Captain Custance. This last was what I least liked writing. It was in vain I told myself that I had fully worked my passage, that I had a right to leave the ship. I knew quite well that I was doing wrong, and that the captain would be disappointed, vexed, and worried by my conduct. I did not tell him in what vessel I was sailing,

but I thanked him, awkwardly enough no doubt, for all the kindness he had shown me.

The letter to my father was less difficult to write. I felt that he would understand.

I had no packages to make; I was deserting in the liner's uniform, but told myself that I had earned that too; besides, the purser had my ten pounds. I would have liked to get some at least of that money to take with me, but it was impossible; I dared not risk arousing suspicions and questions by asking for it. I wished now that I had kept it all myself.

When dark came on the following night, I grew extremely anxious as to how I was to get away; but presently the purser solved my doubts.

"Here, boy," he called as I was going past his stateroom shortly after seven o'clock; "just take this letter—there's a launch going in five minutes—up to James & Chalmers at the top of Main Street, and bring back an answer by the next boat that comes off. Look sharp."

I was quite glad that it was Mr. Black, the purser, who was thus the last to speak to me on board, for he was the one officer I did not care about.

I took the note he gave me, and, with my own two letters in my pocket, ran down the accommodation-ladder to the waiting launch. I told the clerk at James & Chalmers's office that an answer would be called for in the morning, which was no doubt true enough. Then, having posted my letters, I found myself with still two hours to wait until I dared present myself before old Billy at the gangway of the *Lady Lucy*.

I hung about the short streets leading up from the Victoria Quay, and never passed more anxious minutes in my life. But no one hailed me, and at half-past ten, in darkness which was very welcome to my purpose, but with a loud-hammering heart, I stole along the quay to where the *Lady Lucy* lay.

There seemed less bustle upon deck than I had hoped; there being no cargo to be shipped, the clipper's departure was made with comparative leisure, and there were few hands about. An old man with a straggling goatee beard was leaning on the gangway head.

"Your baccy, Billy," I said in a voice that shook with fear and excitement, at the same time putting in his horny hand the sovereign which for several minutes had been clasped in mine.

He took it, bit it, spat on it for luck, then slid it into his pocket, and gave me a searching look.

"You'd best be off below; *he's* in the cabin and 'll likely be on deck in half a jiff."

"I'm going—good night," I said, half dazed at my success. Pritchard had evidently found it needless to advance the price of my admittance to two pounds. "He " was no doubt the dreaded mate.

I knew my way below by heart; a dozen times that day I had pored over a small plan drawn for me by the red-haired boy. I slipped along the shadowy deck, found and opened a door, and dived into the small cabin underneath the poop. In some three seconds I was in the lower bunk, as Pritchard had instructed me. Drawing the clothes up well above my head, that

anyone who might by chance look in should not miss Pritchard's fiery locks, I lay trembling with excitement.

Should I be discovered yet? A firm quick step came up a neighbouring companion-ladder, and I heard it pass along the deck. A clear decisive voice spoke, and I recognized old Billy's speaking in reply, though what he said I could not catch. Was it the mate inquiring for me—that is, for Pritchard? But nothing further happened, and, strange though it seems to me to-day when I look back, I presently dropped off to sleep.

CHAPTER VII

The "Lady Lucy"

It was broad daylight when I awoke, and, after a moment of dazed wonder, recollected where I was. Just for a minute I felt pretty queer.

I had gone in for this wild business like a charging bull—eyes shut, head down; but now that I had really carried out my plan, and was unable to draw back, my mind misgave me a good deal. What would be done with me, I asked myself? I had but little knowledge of the powers of ships' captains in such cases.

But I soon pulled myself together. One thing at least I felt quite sure about; they would not turn back to Port Elizabeth to put me off the ship; a stow-away was not of such account as that. No; there would be a row, no doubt, and I should have to stand hard words and perhaps a trifle of hard usage. But I was now safely on the clipper, and upon her I should have to stay.

In any case, the sooner I showed myself the sooner the first trouble would be over. The sound of steady snoring came from the bunk above me; the steward had no doubt turned in late.

A glance through the small port-hole of the little cabin showed me that we were well out at sea and bowling steadily along before a breeze. I might as well present myself on deck at once and get things over; so, with precautions not to wake my sleeping companion, I slipped out of my bunk and in another minute had opened the cabin door and was going—somewhat slowly now that it came to the point—up the two or three steps that led to the deck.

For "getting over" anything that lay before me it was clear that I should not have long to wait; for on the deck, not three yards away, there stood an officer whom I could recognize at once, in spite of Pritchard's most unflattering description, as the first mate, Mr. Innes.

Boys take but little stock of looks, but I could realize the fact that the first officer was an extremely handsome man. He was clean shaved, with a square chin, broad forehead, and a pair of keen grey eyes. He did not strike me as one likely to be cruel, but he looked hard; yet for all that a man that you could trust—a good man to stand by you in a corner when you had your back against the wall.

He had been walking briskly towards our cabin, but at sight of me he came to a dead stop and fixed me with his steady eyes. I can remember still how spruce he looked; his face apparently just freshly shaved, no speck or crease upon his uniform. There was no officer on board the *Ludlow Castle* with a smarter air.

"And who are you, may I inquire?" were the words

with which he greeted me after a few moments of inspection, as I stood silent before him.

"I'm Stephen Lockitt, sir," I answered in a voice which, screw up my courage as I might, was trembling.

"Stephen Lockitt," he repeated, with no sign of either anger or surprise in eyes or voice; "well, Mr. Stephen Lockitt, I may be mistaken, but I don't recall your name on the ship's books; so perhaps you'll tell me what your business is on board. Are you a passenger by any chance?"

"I've come instead of Willie Pritchard, sir."

"You've come instead of William Pritchard. Most obliging of you, certainly. But may I ask why William Pritchard—whom, by the way, I was about to rouse, as usual, from his lengthy slumbers—has not come himself?"

"Please, sir, he's got a job on shore that he likes better, and I said I'd come instead and do his work on board."

"Again I am afraid I don't quite follow you. The watchman tells me Pritchard came on board last night."

"No, sir, he didn't; it was me."

The mate seemed on the point of questioning me further, when I heard a step upon the poop behind me, and saw the eyes of the young officer—he was perhaps thirty or a little more—look aft above my head. The next instant he was at my side, put a firm hand upon my shoulder, turned me right-about with one swift movement, and marched me up the

short companion-ladder leading to the poop. There stood another officer whom I correctly took to be the captain, and before him the mate stopped.

"Good morning, sir," he said; "a stowaway on board."

I looked up, and in one glance got a sort of inkling of a thing I was not long in finding out: that, though the captain might be so in name and theory, it was the first mate who was the real master of the ship. The captain was well dressed; you could not say that he was dirty or ill-shaven, or that there was anything amiss. And yet you could not take him for the equal of the mate. He lacked the square set of the shoulders, the firm chin, the keen eyes, the determined air. He was a tall good-looking man of about forty-five or so, with a light golden-coloured beard.

"A stowaway! Now how the deuce did he get on?"

"I suppose he slipped by the gangway watchman last night when the fellow wasn't looking. He suggests that he should take the place of Pritchard, who, it seems, has had enough of us."

"What brings you here, boy? Where d'you come from?" asked the captain. His tone seemed to intimate that he took little interest in the affair, and was asking merely as a matter of course.

So, standing cap in hand upon the poop, I told again the story that I had already told so many times before.

When I had finished, Captain Vickers, as his name was, blew a cloud of smoke out slowly through his nostrils, and then looked at the first officer as though

inviting him to speak. It was not the last time by many that I was to see that glance.

"Now, boy," said Mr. Innes, "just how much of that little yarn is truth?"

"All of it, sir," I said.

"That *is* a fact about a boy being picked up by the *Ludlow Castle* after having been washed off a trawler south the Bay," the captain said in a slow voice; "I heard some talk about it there at Port Elizabeth."

"I didn't hear about it, but it may be so of course, sir," said the mate.

"Well, Innes, what's he going to do?" the captain went on after a short pause.

"I'll take your orders, sir."

"Oh well, I suppose he must go on with us as he's on board. Four hours out of port we can't put back for boys. If Pritchard's gone—and Pritchard's no great loss—why, you must set this lad to Pritchard's work. Eh, Innes, don't you think that meets the case?"

"I'll do that, sir, and we can hand him over to the port authorities or the police at Singapore."

"Yes, yes, we'll see about that later. See that he works out his trip; that's all just now. We can't have idle hands aboard this ship."

"I'll see to that, sir," said the mate again; "now, boy, just come this way."

He marched me quickly off the poop and forward, called the steward from below, and introduced me to that much astonished person in the following words:

' Steward, here's a boy who sneaked on board last night instead of Pritchard. Set him on to Pritchard's work, and just take care he does it better than that little shirker did. Each day, the moment you have finished with him, send him up to me. I'll guarantee that he shall find no time to serve the devil on this trip.'

And well did Mr. Innes keep his word. No sooner had I finished work in the saloon and cabins than I found myself on deck and working harder than before, set down with rotten-stone and polishers to cleaning brass. And yet, for all I was dog-tired when at last set free each night to creep to bed, I did my cleaning happily and with a will.

I take it you have never been on board an old-time clipper; then you do not know the beauty of a perfect ship. I was too young and ignorant of sailing-ships to understand or to appreciate the grace of all her lines, or the perfect form and finish of everything about her. As for her canvas, that had been much shortened, naturally; we had no crew of sixty hands on board to keep the clipper's former spread of sail all set to a fair breeze, or shorten for a squall. The masts had been cut down, as I had rightly guessed on my first sight of her, and other alterations had been carried out to make the vessel manageable by a smaller crew.

But there were many ways in which the beautiful old ship had not been spoiled. The cabins and saloons on board the *Ludlow Castle* had been handsome, and had struck me mightily at first; but when I came to see the cabin fittings of the *Lady Lucy* even I could

understand that the great liner's beauty was, in comparison, mere outside show. Her cabin doors, for instance, were of painted wood; those of the clipper were of choice and beautifully grained mahogany. The panels of the *Lady Lucy's* cabins were of satin-wood and rosewood. All the door-handles were of cut glass; and in the captain's stateroom was a four-post bedstead, made of solid teakwood, with tapering posts most wonderfully carved.

One of my greatest pleasures was to polish the ship's bell. It had been painted over until recently, I learnt; but the first officer had had the paint scraped off, and he was never satisfied unless each day I made it shine like gold. And make it shine I did, for I soon grew to be as proud and fond of it as was the mate himself. I loved to have my hands on that old bell. It had a tone like music, and, when I tapped it softly with my knuckles, would give out a mellow note that was a sheer delight to me to hear.

For quite a week and more the first mate's face would set like steel whenever his eyes fell on me. He would come down the deck to where I chanced to be at work, and stand beside me watching, silent for a time. Then presently he would let fly, but always in a cool sarcastic tone, some reprimand; he never gave what you could call abuse.

"Think that job's finished, Lockitt?" he would say.

"I thought perhaps it would do, sir," I would answer, knowing quite well, if only from his tone, that it would not "do" at all.

"Ah, did you? Well then, kindly start on it again,

and put a little backbone into it this time." Then he would walk away and leave me sweating at my job. If ever a man taught a boy to do things thoroughly, that man was Mr. Innes and that boy was I.

As I have said, for a full week or more I never had a good word from him, though he never gave abuse, either to me or to any other of the hands on board. And presently he gradually began to change his tone to me. I had been working as I never worked before, or, I might perhaps say, since. I worked hard partly from the pleasure of being now on board the clipper that had been my father's ship, partly from terror of the mate's sarcastic tongue. There was another reason; strange as it may seem, I really wished to please the mate.

The mate was not only a good seaman, but a gentleman by birth and manners; anyone with half an eye could well see that. By things I picked up from the chat among the men, several of whom were hands who had made previous voyages for the firm, I learnt that Mr. Innes's father was a man of good position, and that the first officer could have been in the navy had he liked. But it was said that he preferred a wooden sailing-ship to anything afloat.

But to go back to the first officer and me. Little by little his tone changed. I well remember the first day on which he gave me what one might call a civil word, and even then his talk began in the old hard sarcastic way.

He had been standing by me while I knelt above the framing of a cabin skylight, cleaning for my very

life. He looked on until both glass and brass were spotless; presently he spoke.

"A trifle harder work than in the *Ludlow Castle*, Lockitt, eh?"

"Yes, sir, it is a little; but I like it better all the same."

He gave a short hard laugh.

"There'll be no passengers to tip you when we get to Singapore, you know. You'd better have gone back to England, it strikes me, handing the mashed potatoes round in the saloon and listening to the band."

"I like this better, thank you, sir," I said again.

He walked to the rail, knocked out the ashes from his pipe, and then came back.

"Now why?" he asked.

"I think because I like a sailing-ship the best, sir; there's less smoke and dirt and noise. And then my father sailed in her before."

"Your father knew the *Lady Lucy* when she was in very different trim from now," the mate said, and I fancied that he sighed; "with five mates, sixty of a crew, masts not cut down, but as they left the yard—ah, if we only had the little hooker as she was in those days we could make her move."

He walked away and said no more; but from that day he was less hard with me. It seemed as though he had been trying me and was satisfied. I worked indeed as hard as ever, but I had the knack of work by this time, and got through my daily jobs with ease.

I must not stay to talk about that voyage across the

Indian Ocean, with its glorious sunrises and sunsets and its cloudless days; its water of so deep a blue as to be at times almost black; its sharks, its flying-fish. We had fair weather all the way, and Mr. Innes kept all hands at work incessantly at touching up the ship in various ways—painting her rail and masts, and polishing her deck till it was like a dancing-floor. Daily the clipper, like a dream of snowy beauty, glided nearer to the East.

And in due time the East was reached. We rounded the northern end of Sumatra and passed Diamond Point; then sailed across the Straits of Malacca, steering for Georgetown in the Island of Penang. The following day we anchored in the roadstead of the port.

We lay at Georgetown for four days, discharging a small part of our cargo; then continued down the coast. That coast much disappointed me at first; it seemed an endless uninviting-looking line of muddy shore and dense dark mangrove-swamp. Behind it lay unbroken forest, level near the coast, then growing undulating till it ended in dark purple mountains that rose far away inland.

Rivers and creeks we passed, many of which had little towns and villages upon their muddy shores. At some of these long lines of curiously constructed fishing-stakes stretched out into the sea, each with a little perch on which we sometimes saw a fisherman sit waiting for the tide to fall and show the fish his nets had caught. Strange-looking craft were in the waters of the Straits; great lumbering Chinese junks,

so shaped that to my eyes it was a wonder that they could be made to float at all, much less to steer; sampans and prahus from the muddy Malay rivers; smaller fishing-boats; with more familiar vessels of all nations—sailing-ships and steamers, tramps and stately liners, British, French, Norwegian, German, coming up from or going down to Singapore.

The evening of the day succeeding that on which we had left Georgetown we brought up and anchored a short distance from the south end of an island lying near the coast. Living at a little town about two miles inland from where we lay there was an agent of the owners, whom the captain had to see. The skipper was rowed ashore; after about an hour he returned and I heard him tell Mr. Innes that the agent had been called away up-country and could not be back for several days.

That evening Mr. Innes called me to him on the poop and said:

“Lockitt, we’re stuck here for a week or thereabouts. I have a brother working about forty miles up-country; he’s an engineer, engaged in making roads. The captain is allowing me three days off to go and see him while we’re here; d’you care to go with me? You won’t see much of this Malay Peninsula that you’re so keen about unless you do. If you would like the trip I dare say that the skipper’ll let you go.”

I was so taken aback with surprise and delight at such an unexpected offer from the mate that I could hardly speak. I felt myself go red with pleasure,

and perhaps that was sufficient answer for Mr. Innes.

“All right, I’ll see to it,” he said; and when the first mate said that he would “see to” anything, all hands on board the *Lady Lucy* knew the thing was just as good as done.

CHAPTER VIII

Up the River

The next day Mr. Innes went ashore and made arrangements for our trip. A boat was to come off the following morning and would land us at a village on the estuary mouth. There chanced to be a river-boat which was returning up-stream to the place where the mate's brother was at work. We should be nearly all day going there, were to spend the next day at the village, and return the following afternoon.

It was just half-past four and still quite dark when we left the ship the next morning. The boat that came to fetch us from the clipper was a rather cranky craft, and, although not exactly nervous, I was not particularly sorry when we got ashore. The boat herself seemed right enough, though she rode very low in the water; it was the way in which the native boatmen trimmed her that astonished me. There being a breeze in-shore they hoisted a small sail, and we scudded across the mile and half of water at a fairish rate. Fastened to the top of the mast were three or four ropes, each with a large loop at the free end. In these loops two or three of the boatmen sat, with their feet resting on the rail. When the boat

heeled to port they leaned far out to starboard, pushing with their feet against the rail, and in this fashion kept her trimmed.

When we had got among the islands that lay thickly in the estuary mouth we lost the breeze; down came the sail, and oars were used. These oars were not much thicker than a good stout walking-stick, while the very tiny blades were fastened on with nails and strips of fibre—rattan fibre Mr. Innes said it was. The rowlock was a single peg, with a small loop of fibre into which the oar was slipped. The whole arrangement did not look much more substantial than a toy, but all the same we were not long in reaching shore.

It had been clear at sea, with the moon near her setting; by the time we entered the estuary she was almost down, and over all the river hung a thick and very chilly fog. We landed on a high and muddy bank, upon the top of which were trees, with houses here and there between. Most of the houses seemed built close upon the water's edge, and many of them overhung it, being built on upright posts like piles, but not so thick.

The river-boat was waiting for us, and in a few minutes we were off. A very handsome boat she was, quite forty feet in length, and, as I noticed, clinker-built. Ten men, besides a steersman, formed her crew, and there were one or two other Malays on board who lounged about the deck. At first the crew used paddles, but the mate said that after we had gone some twelve or fifteen miles up-stream the river

shallowed and we should be poled. Meanwhile the tide was making quickly, the men's work seemed light, and we travelled at a good rate. There was a lantern at the bows, which just enabled us to see the ten dark figures of the crew. Mr. Innes and I were seated underneath a kind of awning, which he told me was made of palm-leaf matting. Outside and behind us was the steersman, who used a long oar as a rudder.

In about half an hour after we had started came a faint pale lightening in the sky, and a chill breeze swept over us and died away. The light, too, seemed to fade away for a few minutes, and then came again. Slowly it spread across the sky; then suddenly this took a beautiful pale-yellow tint, which the next minute changed to a deep rich golden glow. In a few moments more the sun was up, and instantly the scene around us glowed with brilliant light—the muddy river mouth, the countless tree-clothed islands among which we crept.

In less than a quarter of an hour it was hot—not only warm, but really hot; almost too hot indeed, though we were sheltered from the sun's rays by the awning. The mist was rising off the river like a lifted blanket of white wadding, and I began to look about me, eager for my first sight of the East at close quarters.

At first it was perhaps just a little disappointing, as the coast had been. We were upon a maze of muddy water, with low muddy islands all around us, each one thickly covered with dark mangrove trees. A drearier

sight I never wish to see. The tide, though rising fast, was still a long way short of the full flood, and every mangrove tree stood up a few feet in the air upon its mud-stained twisted roots. Below the tree-trunks and among the network of their roots was mud—mud everywhere, brown slimy mud, excepting where brown muddy water flowed. Looked at from close at hand this mud was most repulsive; seen from a distance, with the sunbeams shining on it, it was bright as gold.

However, before long I found that there was plenty to be seen, both on the mud and in the mangrove trees. Birds were all round us—in the air, the trees, and on the mud. Perched on the topmost branch of a dead mangrove tree two great sea-eagles, grey and white, kept uttering a strange melancholy cry, a little like the mewling of a cat. Kites hovered in the sky far overhead; small purple birds—kingfishers, Mr. Innes said—were flashing to and fro from tree to tree. Green pigeons, too, were to be seen; and yet another larger pigeon, uttering every now and then a booming bell-like call. Upon the many mud-flats and about the islands stalked great snow-white padi-birds like herons, and I saw some sandpipers. And all these were a few only of the many birds.

The boat's course often took us pretty close to one or other of the numerous islands. All about their muddy beaches, clambering on the mangrove roots, were crabs. Large green crabs—huge repulsive-looking brutes—were there; with smaller brown ones and some hermit-crabs. And there were countless tiny

crabs no bigger than one's thumb nail, some of which were a rich scarlet colour, others a most lovely blue. The shells of those on which the sun fell gleamed like satin, flashed like jewels on the brown mud.

Some very curious fish I saw too—not in the water, but upon the mud. There was a little fish about six inches long, with fins by means of which it *walked*! Another rather larger fish was wedge-shaped with a pointed tail, a head at least two inches broad, and great protruding eyes. When I first saw it, it was moving slowly in a kind of hobbling fashion on a mud-flat we were passing; then Mr. Innes threw a pebble at it, when at once it used its tail to gain the water in long flying leaps.

In about an hour or so we got clear of the estuary mouth with its innumerable islands, entering the main channel of the river, here quite half a mile across. The stream was running very strongly, with cross-currents, eddies, little whirlpools here and there, the current struggling hard against the rising tide. The mate, who spoke a little of the Malay language, and could understand still more, said something to the steersman, who replied; and Mr. Innes then passed on to me the information that there had been tempest and much rain up-country in the last few days.

The river narrowed as we pushed up-stream, and we kept fairly close in-shore, now upon one side, now upon the other, to avoid the current or to take advantage of the setting of the tide. The mate had brought his rifle with him, and since dawn he had been keeping a look-out for crocodiles, instructing me to do the

same. I do not think that in a general way he was particularly fond of sport; he had admired the birds we saw, but never took a shot at one; but he seemed bent on killing crocodiles—as many as he could. I heard him say one day on board the *Lady Lucy* that each crocodile a man put out of action ought to earn for him an extra month of life. And now he kept his loaded rifle lying ready on his knees.

“It’s better I should pot a crocodile than that a crocodile should pot a man,” he said to me.

Presently the Malay who seemed to be the leading boatman of the crew lifted a hand from his paddle and pointed to the right bank of the river at a spot some forty yards away. I looked in that direction, but at first saw nothing. Then I noticed what looked like a drifted log of wood, some ten feet long, lying on the muddy bank as though it had been stranded by the tide.

But the mate’s rifle had been raised before I had well got my eyes upon the thing, and, as I looked, a sharp report rang out. Then the “log” started into furious life. The creature’s tail lashed violently from side to side and up and down, throwing great clouds of liquid mud into the air. A pair of long and pointed jaws snapped viciously. The men pulled swiftly towards the bank, and Mr. Innes took a second shot. But we were just too late. While we were still a few yards off, the brute plunged wallowing down the bank and disappeared into the stream.

“I had him all the same,” the mate exclaimed; “but I’d have liked to get his head. Still, if he’s booked

for his own special kingdom-come that's almost good enough for me."

"You seem to have a grudge against crocodiles, sir," I ventured to remark, as he slipped fresh cartridges into his rifle.

"That's true, Stephen; I have," he replied. Then he sat silent for some minutes while the boat resumed its way up-stream. But presently he let me know the reason of his special hatred of all crocodiles.

"I spent some months in South America a good while back," he said, "and while there I was often to and fro on rivers where these filthy brutes abound—or rather alligators, which are pretty much the same. I had a fellow with me as my guide and servant; he was a good sort if there ever was one, though his skin was brown. One evening he and I had camped beside a river, and Alfonzo, as his name was, had gone down the bank to draw some water for my 'tub'; to bathe in the stream itself was out of the question, for I knew that it fairly swarmed with these devils. Well, right before my eyes—I was not twenty yards away—an alligator thrust its filthy snout up from the water, seized Alfonzo by the arm he had stretched out to fill the water-skin, and dragged him down. I was beside the water's edge next moment, but it was too late; I never saw my man again. The brutes are said to take their prey and stow it in some hole below the water till it's—seasoned to their taste."

I shuddered at the horrible story, and well understood his hatred for the beasts. After a minute he added:

“So you won’t wonder, Stephen, that I like to put a bullet in a crocodile or any of its kith and kin as often as I get the chance. However, that is rather a dismal tale with which to introduce you to the Malay Peninsula; have you ever heard how the monkey went to doctor the crocodile’s wife?”

I laughed and told him I had not.

“Oh, the Malays have got no end of stories of the crocodile, and in most of them he is made to look rather a fool. For instance, the Malay forest—and this forest that you see on either side of us covers practically the whole of the country, with a bit of clearing and a village, called a kampong, here and there—this forest contains, among other animals, a beautiful little deer, the very smallest known, I think. It is called the mouse-deer, for its body is no larger than that of a good-sized English wild rabbit, and its little legs no thicker than a lead pencil. Well, this mouse-deer is supposed to be a very clever little beast. One day he came down to a river-bank and wished to get across. He could swim quite well, but the trouble was that he knew the river swarmed with crocodiles. So he called out to the king of the crocodiles, who happened to be there, and asked him how many crocodiles he thought there were in the whole country. The king replied that he could not tell him the exact number, but that there must be very many, for a thousand lived in that river alone. The mouse-deer, standing safe upon the bank, said that he rather doubted that, and they had better count; if the king would call up all the crocodiles of the river, and

make them range themselves from bank to bank, he would do the counting.

“The king agreed, called up the crocodiles, and made them lie abreast across the stream. The little mouse-deer stepped lightly on to the back of the first, saying ‘One’; on to the second—‘Two’, and so on till he had stepped right across the stream, when he ran off into the forest, safe and sound. Pretty smart chap, the mouse-deer, eh?”

“Yes, jolly clever of him” I said, laughing; “but what is the tale about the monkey and the crocodile’s wife?”

“Yes, that’s another tale in which the crocodile gets had. The crocodile’s wife was very ill, and the crocodile doctor told her husband that the only remedy to cure her was a monkey’s heart. So the crocodile came in from the sea, where he lived, and swam up and up a river till he came across a group of monkeys swinging in the trees that overhung the stream. He called to one of them to come down on the bank and talk to him. The monkey came down, willing enough, being curious; and the crocodile told him that his wife was very ill, asking if he could tell him who was the best doctor in the neighbourhood. The monkey was not only curious but conceited, and replied at once that he himself was the best doctor anyone could have. The crocodile then asked him if he would come and doctor his wife. The monkey was tremendously flattered, consented at once, got on the crocodile’s back, and away they went down the river.

“The crocodile was so bucked with the success of

his journey that he could not hold his tongue, but, after they had gone some way down-stream, told the monkey that he meant to give his heart to his wife. Naturally the monkey's hair stood on end when he heard this; but he kept his head, and told the crocodile that it was most unfortunate he had not mentioned that before; he had not got his heart with him, having hung it on a tree by the river before starting to play with his friends. They must go back for it if he were to be of any use. The crocodile was soft enough to swallow this, swam back up-stream, and landed the monkey, who, of course, at once made off. And now, when you see a troop of monkeys jabbering and scolding at a crocodile from trees on a river-bank, as monkeys often do, you may be sure that they are asking how his wife is, and whether he has seen a monkey's heart about."

The river, narrowing steadily, had now grown shallow also, while the stream ran very fast. Before midday the boatmen laid aside their paddles and used poles. Of course the men stood up to pole; standing, not in the boat itself, but on a plank that ran along the gunwale on each side. First all the men walked forward, five on either side, each with his pole held high above his head; then plunged their poles into the water, and, pushing hard upon them, walked back down the plank. Each time they plunged their poles into the water the men raised a curious chanting kind of cry.

The boatmen were fine-looking fellows, though not very tall. Their feet and legs to far above the knees

were bare; for they had tucked up their *sarongs*, a kind of skirt. Besides the sarong, some of the men wore a short-sleeved jacket, and all had a handkerchief twisted like a turban round the head. Some of these turbans were very smart and jaunty in shape, having a little top-knot at the front or on one side. The men smiled and chatted among themselves, but on the whole I thought their features rather grave. Tucked into his sarong, where it was folded at the waist, each carried a sheathed knife, which Mr. Innes told me was the famous *kris*, the favourite weapon of Malays.

Narrower and narrower grew the river. Every now and then some smaller stream joined ours, and at times we passed a village on the bank. Sometimes the river's course would be quite straight for half a mile or more; then would come turns and bends, and some of these were very sharp. By mid-day we had reached a point at which the river was about a hundred yards across.

The mangrove trees and mud had disappeared some time before. Thick forest came down to the water's edge on both sides of the stream—forest so thick that, had we wished to land, I did not see a spot, except beside some village, where we could have forced our way through the dense growth. I noticed palms, some tall and feathery-topped, some low and spreading, with a hundred other kinds of trees of which I did not know the names. And everywhere from tree to tree hung creepers, linking the whole into a close impenetrable mass.

Not long after midday we left the main river, taking

our course up a smaller one that joined the larger stream from the north-east. It was soon after this that I observed our boatmen often looking keenly up the stream as though they were expecting to see something coming down. I mentioned this to Mr. Innes, and he said a few words in Malay to the steersman.

"They're on the look-out for an *apong*," he informed me, when he had received the man's reply.

"What is an *apong*, sir?" I asked.

"Something that we have no great wish to meet with, Stephen," said the mate; "an *apong* is a floating island."

"A floating island! Why, I didn't know there were such things."

"Oh yes, there are. In many Malay rivers, at a bend or at some point where a sharp spur of land juts out into the stream, the water gradually undermines it and perhaps partially surrounds it. Then, when there comes a sudden heavy flood, or what we Scots would call a 'spate', the strip of land sometimes gives way, becomes detached, and floats off down the stream, with trees and grass and everything growing on it. I've sometimes seen such floating islands two or three miles out at sea. If we should chance to meet an *apong* in a narrow reach of river it's quite possible that we might get upset; sometimes they're fairly big, and take up all the fairway of the stream. However, it is hardly one chance in ten thousand, I should fancy, that we get in touch with one to-day; though certainly it is in times of flood that they most frequently come down."

It was intensely hot, even for Mr. Innes and me who were sheltered by the awning; yet our boatmen, exposed though they were to the full blaze of the sun, plied their poles without seeming to be at all exhausted or in any way affected by the heat. For several hours now the forest upon either side had been quite silent; not a bird was to be heard, and the only sound, except the monotonous cry of the men as they plunged their poles in the water, was the rush of the river, with now and then the grating of a pole-tip on its bed.

And it was in this strange hot silence that the one chance in ten thousand of which Mr. Innes had spoken came off. As we were creeping slowly past a bend round which the river swept at racing speed, a cry went up quite suddenly from all the men

“Apong, apong!”

I looked out eagerly ahead from underneath our shelter, and I saw a palm tree many feet in height advancing towards us down the stream. When I caught sight of it it must have been about a hundred yards away, and I could see that it was standing on an island covered with tall tangled grass and shrubs. The floating mass almost completely blocked the fair-way of the stream, leaving only a very narrow space between it and the bank on either side. Through both these channels poured a mass of raging foaming water, brown with mud. To strike the island, which was swiftly bearing down upon us, was to be upset; yet there seemed little chance of getting past on either side.

I saw all this far more rapidly than I have written

it, saw, too, the desperate efforts that our boatmen made to save the boat. At the same instant that the cry of "Apong!" left their throats they turned her prow across the stream and made a dash for the left bank, where the space between the floating island and the shore was slightly broader and the rush of the water consequently less furious. The island was even then close upon us; yet I think we might perhaps have escaped collision with it had not the pole of the man in the bow snapped suddenly in half with the sudden effort he had made. It was for a fraction of a second only that the boat lost way, but that short space of time was quite enough. We needed scarcely half a dozen yards to pull clear of the apong, but the natives plied their poles in vain. Quite suddenly I saw the feathery branches of the palm tree waving right above my head; a second later came a violent shock, and the tree fell forward, right upon the boat. The next thing I knew was that I was struggling in the water, tangled in the wreckage of the awning.

For several minutes as it seemed to me—though it could have been but a few seconds—I felt that I was being sucked under, held down by some crushing weight upon my back. Then, with a desperate effort, I managed to drag myself free and dived for my life.

I rose at last, clear of the apong and the boat; dashed the water from my eyes, and, seeing a mass of trees before me not ten yards away, struck out. The stream was running like a mill-race, and the current swept me down perhaps fifty yards; but I reached the bank, clutched at an overhanging tree root, and held on.

At once I looked about for my companions; had they all been drowned? No; for far down the stream I saw the fatal apong, and upon it stood a little group of figures, five or six at most. I made out by their dress that they were native boatmen; there was not a sign of Mr. Innes.

Had he been held down under water by the boat as it upset, or sucked beneath the island, and so drowned? But while I was still looking, suddenly I saw the group of natives rush together to the apong's edge, stoop down, drag something from the water, and lay that something at their feet. Was it another native or the mate? And then the island swung round slightly, and a clump of undergrowth upon it hid the group of figures from my sight. Another moment and it had swept round a bend of the stream and disappeared entirely from view. I was alone, with the swiftly flowing stream before me and the vast silent forest behind.

CHAPTER IX

The Night beside the Stream

All this that it has taken me so long to tell had happened in a very few minutes; I don't think more than three had passed between our first sighting the apong and the moment when I found myself clinging, drenched and breathless, to the tree root on the river-bank, watching the floating island disappear from sight, and realizing that I was utterly alone with not a soul at hand to help me. A moment later something flashed into my head which made me struggle desperately to get upon dry land; for, although holding firmly to the root, I was still in the water well above my waist.

It was the crocodiles that I remembered. Farther down the river we had seen several besides the one at which Mr. Innes had fired. True, we were many miles above the tidal water now; but I was far from sure that I was safe from the brutes' jaws. The mate had told me that they often lived far up the rivers and would even sometimes travel for some distance overland. And the thought of my possible danger made me struggle desperately to get ashore.

It was no very easy job, although it would have

been a simple matter in a Devonshire stream. But here, as I have said, the forest came down to the water's edge in a dense, almost impenetrable hedge. Tall trees stood on the bank, with smaller ones of every size, and shrubs and undergrowth; and all were bound together by a mass of creepers, many of them thick with thorns. I tore my clothes, I scratched my face and hands in scrambling up the bank; but I was frantic at the thought that any moment I might feel the snap of two great jaws upon my legs. In about half a minute I was high and dry, panting, exhausted, bleeding, but yet safe—I hoped—from crocodiles.

The level of the bank was some six feet above the water, and upon it I lay thinking what I must do next. The longer I thought, the more hopeless my position seemed. It was true that Mr. Innes, or perhaps some of the boatmen, might have got ashore as I had done; but I was more than half inclined to think that this was not the case. Several at least of the boatmen were, as I had seen, still on the apong; moreover, they had dragged out of the water someone who was either drowned, or injured, or insensible, as it had seemed to me from the brief glimpse I caught. It might well be the mate. If that were so, there would be no one to direct the natives what to do. Indeed, it was most likely that they would have no means or power of controlling the headlong course of the floating island; even if they had saved their boat-poles, which was hardly likely, these would be of very little use in such a case. It seemed to me that I could look for little help from anyone except myself.

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What had I better do, I asked myself? Go on to the village at which Mr. Innes's brother was working? It lay, the mate had told me a short time before the accident, still about twenty miles up-stream; moreover it was on the farther bank—the right bank—of the river, while I was upon the left. Should I follow the river-bank downwards, on the chance that some of my companions might have got ashore? At once it came into my head that I could only do so for about three miles; to that point, namely, where our river joined the larger, broader stream. Now that main river was at least a hundred yards broad at the point where we had left it, and, with the dread of crocodiles upon me, I was not inclined to try to swim across. Nor had I seen a sign of any village where the rivers joined.

I stood up and looked about me. When I did so, the plan of going anywhere at all, at least in any definite direction, seemed ridiculous. Before me was the rushing river, while behind me and on either side was the thick tangle of the forest—just about as thick as a good well-kept road-side English hedge. How could I hope to make my way through that? Of any sort of path there was no sign.

Mr. Innes had told me that there were very few roads in that part of the country; that here and there were rough and narrow bridle-tracks, but that the chief ways by which the natives travelled from place to place were the rivers themselves. He had remarked, however, that such paths as did exist were mostly on or near the river-banks, paths often scarcely eighteen inches wide.

Somewhere, however, I must go; it was quite clear I could not stay there on the river-bank and starve. For all I knew there might be a path close at hand which would lead somewhere, and I had better set about looking for it. I got up from the bank and turned my back upon the stream.

But before doing so I shouted—more than once—on the bare chance of any of the others having got ashore. But there was no reply; and, to tell the truth, the sound of my own voice in that great stillness, broken only by the rushing of the river, fairly frightened me. Besides, it might perhaps rouse some wild and savage animal; better to keep as quiet as I could.

At first I was wholly at a loss in what direction to attempt to move, so thick was the tangle upon every side. But I was now determined to get *somewhere*, and began resolutely to push and edge my way forward. Hard work it was, and even painful; nearly every creeper carried thorns, which scratched my skin and tore my clothes, and often fairly held me back from going on. The foothold, too, was bad; a thick deep mass of dead decaying leaves, mixed up with moss and ferns and long rank grass; and there were hidden roots and stumps that caught my feet, so that I often tripped and sometimes fell.

But I pushed on, though very slowly. Happily I had my knife, a good stout clasp-knife, in my pocket, and of this I made good use, cutting such creepers as I could, and fairly “hacking my way through”, as people say to-day. But hack as busily and force my way as quickly as I could it must have taken me at

least an hour to move back a hundred yards from the stream's side. I found it very difficult to keep to any one settled direction, but I did my best to make my way straight inland from the bank. By doing so, if there happened to be a path that ran parallel with the river, I ought to come upon it sooner or later.

And presently I came, not to a path indeed, but to a little clearing; hardly a clear place, but just a spot where the great trees were fewer and the undergrowth less densely thick. On one side of this clearing ran a little stream which must have joined the river a short distance above the place where I had landed.

The afternoon was still intensely hot. I felt that I should be the better for a bathe; for I was muddy, covered with scratches, and my clothes soaked with water. I stripped and spread my clothes out in the sun, then lay down in the stream; it was both clear and very shallow and at least could hold no crocodiles.

The bath was very welcome, and, stretching myself upon the bank to dry, I felt better. I was not yet particularly hungry; we had brought bread and meat and pastry, with some lime-juice, from the ship, and both the mate and I had had a meal not very long before the accident occurred. Still, I began to wonder what I was to do for my next meal.

Then, as I lay there on the bank, I noticed a most welcome sight—a tiny opening in the thickness of the wall of forest on the clearing's farther side. You could not say it was a path; it was rather a mere slit, a kind of crack, in the great hedge of trees and undergrowth. I got up quickly, naked as I was, and crossed the stream

to look at it. It might have been a native track, although it did not look as though it were much used; still I could see that I could make my way through it with rather less of trouble than the distance which I had already come had given me. If it was a path it must surely lead somewhere; if it was not, I might as well go that way as another, so I told myself.

I dressed in haste, my clothes being almost dry, and set off down this narrow track. Often I had to pause to cut away some creeper; often it was only with much trouble that I made my way. But I got on a good deal quicker than before, and that was so much to the good.

The opening had led from the small clearing in a direction almost parallel with that in which the little stream was flowing; but so thick was the forest upon either side that I could never see for more than ten or fifteen yards around me—often even less. But sometimes I could hear the stream, and the soft rippling sound of its water was very welcome. As long as I was travelling near to it I should at least not die of thirst.

I don't remember that I troubled much about the chance of meeting with wild beasts. I knew that such were to be found in the Malay Peninsula—rhinoceroses, elephants, with tigers and some other animals. But I soon found myself in trouble enough with other creatures, namely, the many insects of the country.

The insects swarmed. The air seemed full of flies of various kinds, together with mosquitoes, flying beetles, wasps, and other sorts quite new to me. I

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cannot say that I had known mosquitoes, but I was a very little time ashore before making their acquaintance, and a most unpleasant one it was. They had seemed thickest by the river, growing rather fewer as I worked inland, perhaps because the ground rose slightly but steadily, becoming drier and free from damp patches and small pools. All the same I was soon bitten in a score of places.

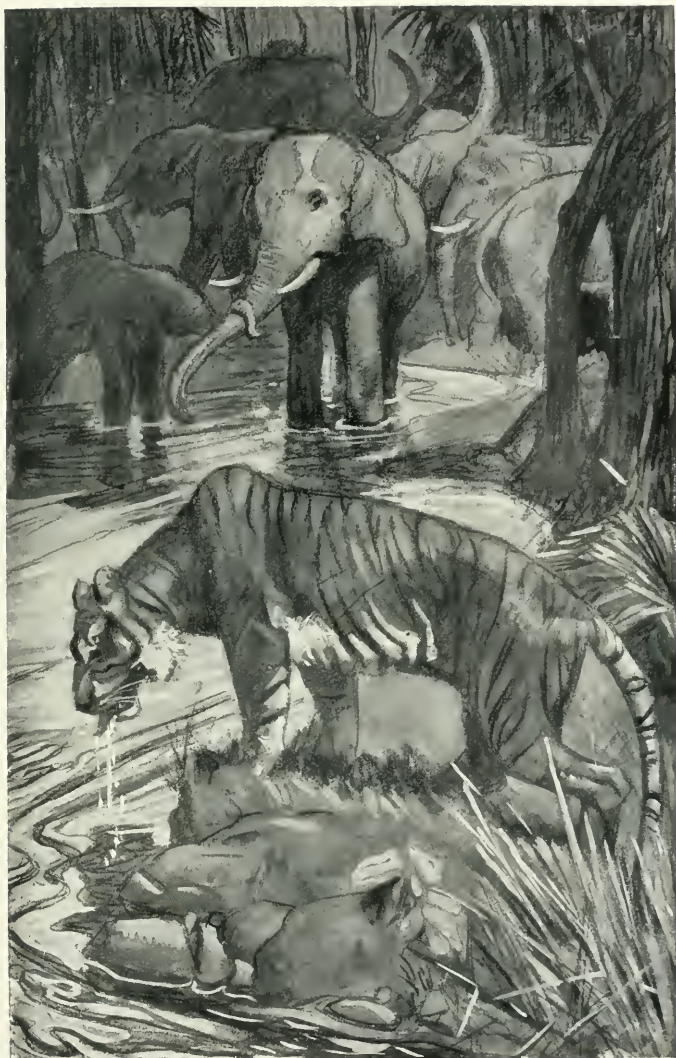
The wasps I saw did not attack me, but this was fully made up for by the ants. There were ants in many places on the ground; but far worse were the innumerable red ants swarming upon almost every other tree. I would be making my way along a little stretch of track where not an ant was to be seen; then, as I brushed against a tree, or shook it as I passed, they would be on me in an instant, running down the trunk or the long creepers that hung trailing from the stem and boughs. Each of these ants was furnished with a pair of nippers, and each one as it came hurrying up held straight up in the air the hinder portion of its body in a way that made me laugh—at first.

I did not laugh for long; their bite was something to remember for a week. They bit my hands and wrists, they wriggled up my shirt-sleeves and crept down my neck. Those I could see and reach I did my best to kill or tear away; but the infuriated little torments held on like grim death, letting themselves be pulled to pieces rather than leave go their hold. I tore at them, I slapped them, crushed their bodies on my skin, but all was little use; still more of them came on to the attack.

Still these ants did not live in every tree, although it seemed as though they were concealed in most. I had to make the best of things, however, and I still pushed on. I had no means of knowing the time, excepting by the sun; for, thinking I should be with Mr. Innes while away, I had left on the ship the silver watch my father gave me on my fourteenth birthday. I knew that it was after one o'clock a little time before our accident occurred; by this time it must be quite half-past three or four. At six it would be sunset, and I knew that with the sunset quickly came darkness. I had no wish to let dark come upon me in this forest track. If I could reach no house or village I must hope to come upon some open space in which to spend the night.

Although the sun was shining from an absolutely cloudless sky it was deep twilight in the path, if path it could be called. While travelling up the river in our boat I had well seen how thick the forest was; but it was not till I was really in it, underneath the giant trees, that I completely realized how they shut out the light. The only time that I had been in open sunlight since I left the river was in the little patch of clearing by the stream.

This semi-darkness, with the thought that night might overtake me in it, was now getting on my nerves. So was the silence; for the forest, save for the ceaseless hum and drone of insects, was intensely still. I had imagined that the birds would sing; but there was not a single note; indeed, except while on the river, I had hardly seen a bird. When I stood still to rest, all



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round me was dead silence; when I pushed on, the noise I made in struggling through the undergrowth and creepers fairly frightened me; but it was better than the silence when I paused.

For some two hours after I had left the little clearing I went forward pretty fast. The path was bad and narrow, consequently I stumbled into holes or over sticks or roots; always the trees and bushes brushed my shoulders on each side. But I had not to cut and clear my way as much as I had done between the clearing and the river bank, and I dare say that in two hours I had gone three miles.

And presently, quite suddenly, the forest thinned.

The track I had been following joined a rather broader one, and then another still. A little afterwards I came out on a clear and open space that lay on both sides of a rapid shallow stream perhaps thirty feet in breadth and little more than two feet deep. Upon both banks the open ground extended back for about fifty yards.

I do not mean that it was wholly bare of trees, but that the trees stood much less closely than elsewhere and there was hardly any undergrowth. Beneath the trees the ground, in some parts covered with short grass, was in most places wholly bare, showing dark red soil. On these bare patches it was covered thickly with a perfect maze of footprints; footprints of animals, as I could see, although they were so mixed together that I could not judge at all what kind of animals had made them or if all were made by the same beasts.

The sun was now very low in the sky, and a cool breath of wind stirred in the forest; birds began to call and sing. I knew that sunset, to be followed quickly by the darkness, was at hand; knew, too, that I was hungry, very tired, and could go no farther without rest.

For my hunger there seemed no remedy just then. I had seen fruit and berries here and there on trees and bushes that I passed; but I had a wholesome dread of poisonous fruit and had refrained from eating any, hoping that I might soon come to a village or at least find something that was plainly fit to eat. But for the moment what I chiefly needed was to rest and sleep. I had been up since four o'clock that morning, had been struggling through the forest for the last few hours, and was tired out.

The sunset came. The sky grew gold and pink and purple, and then quickly faded into grey. In a few minutes night would be upon me; and, besides my weariness, I could not go on walking through the forest after dark. I could not hope to find a better spot in which to rest than by this running stream.

On looking round I saw what struck me as a rather tempting bed. The clearing altogether, on both sides the stream, was perhaps about an acre in extent, or even more. There were several tall trees about it, standing well out from the forest. One, especially, was a perfect giant; its great stem stretched upwards, bare of branches, for some thirty feet or more; and from its roots, the upper parts of which appeared above the ground, great ridges, which reminded me

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a little of the buttresses at Sheldon church, ran up the trunk for fully half a dozen yards. Close to the ground these ridges stood out from the giant stem like walls, leaving clear spaces in between them. The ground was firm and dry. If I made up a bed of fern and leaves and grass in one of these shelters I could sleep well enough.

I had about decided upon doing so when a thought came into my head that made me change my plan. What about all those tracks upon the ground? They were most certainly the tracks of animals. No doubt the stream was a favourite drinking-place. I knew that it was usually at night that wild beasts came to drink, and what would happen to me if a rhinoceros or tiger, even perhaps an elephant, came there and found me lying asleep upon the ground? No, I could not risk that.

Where else to sleep I could not see. I looked at the great buttresses again. They sloped up steeply in a narrow ridge which it would not be very hard to climb; but from the highest point to which they might be climbed it was a good ten feet to the first branches of the tree, and the stretch of trunk that lay between was perfectly smooth, offering no sort of foothold. I looked at several other trees which stood about the clearing, but it was the same with all; not one of them had branches low enough for me to reach.

Then a happy thought struck me. Taking my knife from my pocket I went to the edge of the clearing, re-entered the forest, and soon found what I wanted—a tree from which there trailed a long creeper; there

were yards and yards of it. It took me several minutes to drag down some dozen yards or so, but it was done at last, and I was possessed of a good length of tough but slender line, as strong and supple as a rope.

Then I searched the edge of the stream until I found a long and rather narrow stone. This I tied securely to one end of my line, the rest of which I coiled over one arm, and then went back to the tree I had chosen. With the line slung over my arm, sitting astride the highest root-ridge, I managed without much trouble to work my way to its top, where I was some ten feet below the nearest bough. I then uncoiled my line, and, holding on with my knees and one hand, tried to throw the stone across the bough above my head. Owing to my cramped position it was several minutes before I succeeded; but I did so at last, and had the line looped safe across the bough. After that it was no very hard job to haul myself up hand over hand until I was astride the branch, quite thirty feet above the ground.

There I felt pretty safe. No tiger, I was sure, could climb so straight and bare a tree, and it was not a job for a rhinoceros. As to the exact distance that an elephant could reach with its trunk I was not quite so sure; but anyway I had to risk something. Besides, I knew that nearly all wild animals tracked their prey mainly by their sense of smell; and it seemed hardly likely that, from a place thirty feet above the ground, my scent would give the hiding-place away.

The bough was large and broad enough to give a fairly comfortable seat, on which I felt secure from

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falling off. Still, to make doubly sure, I uncoiled my line again; succeeded, after some trying, in looping it round the tree-trunk by means of the stone at the end; and then knotted it about my waist. If I did chance to fall while sleeping I should hang suspended and wake up.

When I was settled fairly snugly on my perch it was quite dark. Every bone in my body ached; I was dead tired, and, I thought, sleepy. But, for all that, I continued broad awake, my ears alive to every sound. These sounds had changed. The birds that had been singing, calling, for the last half-hour, were now silent, but a host of other noises came from all around. Strange hoots and cries rang through the night; I was quite sure I heard a night-jar's call. There were short barks, uttered, as I knew later, by some kind of deer. And faintly now and then, from far away, there came the trumpeting of elephants. I knew that sound, having once heard it at a circus I had seen in Exeter.

For a good hour, perhaps more, I sat upon my bough and listened to these noises, starting nervously at each fresh sound. Now a bush rustled only a few yards away below me; now I fancied that I could make out some creature gliding stealthily across the ground below the tree; though such a fancy could be nothing but imagination, for it was pitch dark. It seemed as if I should not sleep a wink all night.

But I did sleep at last, although at first uneasily, and often starting into sudden wakefulness, roused perhaps by some new noise. And presently I woke up broad awake, my heart beating violently, and my

whole body conscious of a most intolerable itching. This, I soon found, was caused by clouds of some new insect foes which swarmed all over me.

Darkness had gone; but it was not the light of day that lit the scene below. A full moon floated in the sky, and the whole clearing by the stream was flooded with its light, which made the ripples on the water gleam like silver, while on every side the darkness of the forest seemed more deep.

I looked down on the clearing spellbound; for its emptiness, its silence broken only by the flowing of the stream, were gone, and the whole place was full of life. My first thought was of thankfulness that I was not upon the ground as I had planned.

Standing beside and in the stream, half in the moonlight, half in the shadow where the water disappeared again into the tangle of the forest, was a group of eight or nine great elephants. Some three or four of them were in the stream itself, dipping their trunks into the water, which they spouted on their backs and sides; while others standing on the bank had seemingly been doing the same, for I could see their great bodies shining wet in the moonlight. From the group there came from time to time a curious rumbling noise. When I had watched them for a little I made out a baby elephant, which kept close to one I took to be its mother, often standing quite underneath her body. The great beasts were stamping their heavy feet in the water, switching their short tails to and fro, and flapping their immense ears with a loud smacking noise. One of the largest had a splendid pair of tusks.

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Above the group of elephants, just where the stream flowed out into the clearing from the forest, there were several deer. They stood all grouped together with a timid air, their pricked ears twitching at each sound and movement of the elephants, and their slim necks bent from time to time to drink. They seemed each moment on the point of darting off in terror. But it was to a spot almost immediately below me that my eyes soon turned.

For there, in the full moonlight, nosing at the ground—and even eating it, it seemed to me—were six or eight great animals which I felt sure were some sort of buffalo. They were as tall as very big cart-horses, with tremendous necks and shoulders, massive heads, and spreading horns whose points curved inwards towards each other till they nearly met. They stamped their hoofs in an impatient manner, pawing up the bare and trodden soil, then stooping to mouth it with apparent relish.

While I sat watching them, two of the biggest—bulls, I guessed they were—chanced to meet. In an instant, with a low gruff bellow from each beast, they lowered their shaggy heads and charged each other furiously. Their heads met with a sounding crash; the great brutes pushed and struggled, grunting, pushing, swaying to and fro. I thought that my chance would have been a pretty poor one had I lain between the tree-roots as I had first meant to do.

For several minutes the great creatures fought. Then suddenly the smaller of them, who had obviously been giving ground, turned tail and bolted away into the

blackness of the forest. The other, after bellowing loudly and triumphantly, turned to his nosing of the ground.

Just then, from somewhere in the darkness not far off, there came a low and grumbling kind of roar. The buffaloes—if they were buffaloes—threw up their heavy heads and snorted angrily. One of the elephants trumpeted, and the whole group began to fidget to and fro uneasily upon their feet, although they stood their ground. But in an instant every deer had vanished from the scene.

For a few minutes there was a dead silence, as if every beast in the clearing was waiting, listening, for something. Then, where the deer had stood, a long low body glided out into the moonlight by the stream. I saw the stripes upon its sides and knew it for a tiger.

The largest elephant trumpeted loudly again, with a sound of defiance; the buffaloes stood rigid, each head turned to the new-comer. The tiger crept down to the stream, and took a long slow drink. I watched the water dripping, like a rain of silver, from its jaws.

Some heavy night-flying insect blundered into my face and made me start. My foot slipped on the bough with a sharp scraping noise. There was a snort and a sudden rush from the great beasts below me; in another instant the whole herd had plunged into the forest out of sight. Splashing and crashing from the water, every elephant at once made off; the baby galloping beside its mother, squealing shrilly with alarm. When I looked up the stream the tiger was no longer there. The clearing was once more so still, so empty

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and forsaken in the moonlight, that the whole thing might have been a dream. But still I heard, though growing fainter every instant, the loud tearing sounds that told of buffaloes and elephants in full retreat, crashing their headlong way through bushes, creepers, trees. In two minutes all was still.

CHAPTER X

Alone

I was awakened by the level beams of sunrise shining on my face. For a few moments I lay dazed—sat, rather, for it was in that position I had passed the night—and wondered where on earth I was. Then the adventures of the day before, the apong, my escape from the catastrophe which had overtaken the boat and at least some of my companions, my long struggle through the forest, with the night scene in the clearing—all this rushed into my mind.

In the broad open space below me all was still, and not an animal was to be seen; only the stream was murmuring pleasantly along its stony bed. There was no sign of elephants or deer, of the great buffaloes, or of the stealthy tiger. But all round the forest rang with sound.

A thousand birds were calling, screaming, whistling; one note that I heard continually was not unlike the singing of an English thrush. Insects were humming, brilliant dragon-flies were flashing to and fro. A troop of monkeys—many of them, judging from the noise they made—was travelling through the tree-tops somewhere not far off; I could not see them, but for several

minutes I could note their progress by the whoops and chatter, and the movement of the branches as they passed. From far away there came, often repeated, a loud call "coo-ey, coo-ey"; but I did not know the argus pheasant then.

The clearing was a blaze of sunlight; but, as the sun rose higher, the great spreading branches of the tree in which I sat cast a deep shadow on my bough. And all the forest round me lay in a deep shadow, cool and dark.

I stretched myself, rubbed my cramped limbs, and began to take stock of the situation and to think what I was to do next. One fact was uppermost; I was now very hungry. For this I could not see a remedy as yet; but I should have to find one before long or else lie down and die. And that I did not feel at all inclined to do. In spite of the predicament that I was in, entirely alone, lost in a foreign land six thousand miles from home, surrounded, as I had so lately seen, by savage beasts, the world still seemed a very pleasant place, in which it was impossible to be depressed. The sun was shining brightly, birds were singing, and there was a pleasant and invigorating feeling in the morning air. No, I was determined to live as long as I could. I would find some way out of my difficulties.

If I must yet go hungry for a time, at any rate I could still drink—and also bathe. Having slipped the fibre rope from round my waist, and looked carefully about on every side, to make quite sure that the coast was clear of tigers, buffaloes, or other foes, I

swung off from my perch and slid down the great buttress to the ground. Going to the stream I took a drink of its clear water, then stripped off my clothes and bathed.

The next thing to be settled was which way to go. More than one path, or rather track, entered the clearing from the side of the stream on which I stood—the opposite one to that from which I had approached it on the previous afternoon. One of these tracks I soon decided on as being the best to take. I had by now rather lost count of my direction; but I reckoned roughly that, if I kept on the course which I had followed on the day before, I ought to come in time to the broad river off which we had branched. There would most probably be villages and people somewhere thereabouts, and I might get some tidings of the mate if there were any tidings to be had.

So, out of several tracks that here entered the clearing, I picked out the one that seemed to lead me in the right direction, and set off down it at a good round pace. It was a rather better path than that by which I had arrived the night before—broader and not so thickly overgrown. It also seemed to be the one by which the animals had come; for it was freshly trodden, and in places twigs and branches had been broken from the trees and bushes on each side.

Good as it was, comparatively speaking, yet it must not be supposed a good hard path like those that lead through many an English wood. Often I went knee-deep in moss and rotting leaves with ferns and thick coarse grass. Often, as on the previous afternoon, I

stumbled over hidden tree-roots or dead branches lying concealed. Spiders' webs, too, stretched across the track from time to time. In one or two of these I saw the spider, and the looks of the creature were a good deal short of being pleasant.

Sometimes the track was fairly level, but more often it led either up or down, though it was never very steep. In places, sometimes for a quarter of a mile or more, it led through damp and marshy ground, and here the going was pretty bad, chiefly because I had to pick my way with care past holes quite a foot in breadth, and often two feet deep in water, mud, and slime. It puzzled me at first to think what could have made these holes; but then it struck me that they were just what the feet of elephants would punch when the great beasts were travelling through soft ground. In this surmise I was, as I discovered later, perfectly correct. I took care not to go too fast, and I moved softly, listening for any sound of danger lying ahead.

I was still bothered more or less with insects, though less so than upon the previous day, quite possibly because the morning air was still comparatively fresh. I wished I had tobacco with me, knowing that smoke would keep them off to some extent; but, though I had already often smoked upon the sly, and had some cigarettes on board the clipper, I had not brought them on the river trip, being well aware that Mr. Innes did not hold with cigarettes for boys.

What most surprised me on my journey through the forest was the noticeable absence of living creatures—

except, indeed, the insects. Birds I could hear, though even these grew silent as the day wore on; but I rarely saw one. Flowers, too; I had fancied that a tropical forest would be one great blaze of gorgeous colour; but, save for a stray blossom here and there—high in a tree-top or upon a clearing's edge—I saw no flowers. Green, everything was green, of widely varying shades, from a pale yellow tint to almost black.

There were some creatures, certainly, that I could very well have done without. These were the leeches that abounded where the path was at all damp—often in other parts as well. They were as vicious and determined as the insect pests. Some were quite small and brown; others were several inches long, green, with a yellow stripe upon their backs. These, with their heads raised high, came crawling from the bushes or along the ground, came with a horrid sort of bowing movement, fastening on me as I passed. Some managed to crawl up inside my trousers, and soon blood was running down my legs. I did the best I could to keep the nasty creatures off by tying my trousers round the ankles with fine fibre, but they still contrived to find their way inside.

However, in spite of insects and leeches, I tramped on quite cheerfully for some two hours, at the end of which I sat down for a rest. The question of a meal was growing serious with me now. Hardly a single bird had crossed my path; and, even had one done so, I possessed no weapon with which to kill it. Berries I saw upon some bushes, but I still felt shy of these. But I should have to take the risk of poison

and try some presently if nothing else turned up.

But just then something did turn up—or rather “down”. I had sat down on the projecting roots of a great tree that towered up beside the track. As I sat thinking, feeling not so cheerful now that the freshness of the morning and the good of my night’s sleep were wearing off, there came a sudden rustling in the branches high above my head. I nearly jumped out of my skin; for the next moment, following the rustling, came the sound of something heavy striking against branches as it fell, and finally a thud upon the ground.

Barely two yards away, now lying half buried in the grass and leaves where it had fallen, was a large green, slightly oval fruit. It was almost as large as my own head—far larger than the biggest coco-nut that I had ever seen. As I examined it a thrill of horror ran all down my back at seeing the danger that I had so narrowly escaped.

For the great globe was thickly covered with short, stout, and very sharply-pointed spines. No doubt about their sharpness, for I touched one cautiously and felt the point. Only the difference of a yard or two and this great bullet would have fallen heavily upon my head, inflicting a most fearful wound.

Then came into my mind one afternoon a year before, when, sitting reading in the public library at Newton Prior, I had been extremely fascinated with a book about the East, with its descriptions of wild animals and birds and trees. I now recalled distinctly one particular description from among the rest. This

well-protected fruit that lay upon the ground beside me was the durian-fruit—and it was good to eat!

But how was I to get at the delicious pulp which, as I now remembered with delight, was concealed inside? I had my knife, but even its stout blade looked very small and weak to open such a solid rind.

However, I sat down on the ground beside it and examined it more closely. There was nothing by which to pick it up, for the stalk had broken off close to the fruit itself. But I managed to cut off the points of a few of the spines, and presently had made a slit. A minute later I had got the fruit lying open in two halves.

Inside were five compartments, each one containing a single brown seed about the size of a horse-chestnut, with each seed surrounded by a mass of creamy-looking pulp. The seeds themselves looked rather tempting, but I was not sure of them, so let them be. I dipped my finger in the creamy stuff and put it to my mouth. The next moment I was scooping it up in what my stepmother would certainly have called a very vulgar way.

Even when I had swallowed a good deal, I could not well have said exactly what it tasted like; it could not be compared to any other single thing I knew. It reminded me just a little of the clotted cream of my own county, as also of butter and of custard. There was, too, a taste of almonds in it; also a flavour of onions! And there was a something that reminded me of the half-glass of sherry wine that I was given with my roast goose and plum-pudding every Christ-

mas Day. I do not say these were all the flavours that the fruit had, but they were a few of them.

I did not stop to think too much about or criticize my treasure, for it tasted far too good. When I had done with the two halves they were as clean as any fish-plate that a cat has had the chance to lick. I was still rather hungry, and I wished the durian tree would drop its fruit in pairs; but I was no longer starving, and felt very much refreshed.

Again I plodded on, following the track that led—I knew not where; perhaps to some village, perhaps only deeper into the thick forest. It was no good to worry about that; I must go in some direction, and as well take this as another.

The way led past or crossed many clearings, and these were often of considerable extent. The ground was generally quite clear of trees, but covered with a very tall, coarse, sharp-edged grass. It was upon the edges of these clearings that I saw the only flowers—brilliant patches of bright colour, crimson, blue, or yellow, high up in the trees upon the edge.

Here, too, were birds, which flew into the shelter of the forest as I came in sight. A kingfisher, or some bird very like one, with a tail and wings of deep rich blue; a larger bird a little like a crow, with a black head and reddish wings. Green pigeons were the birds that seemed most plentiful, with now and then another kind with plumage of deep shining bronze. And one most curious bird I saw, high up in a tall tree, with a great horny crest upon its head—a hornbill, as I guessed.

There were some splendid butterflies, which would have made the mouth of a boy friend of mine, a keen collector, water at the sight. Some of these butterflies were coloured blue and black, others were black and gold. The wings of some must have been quite six inches broad from tip to tip.

Once the track led me through a broad expanse of marsh, winding among still pools of stagnant uninviting-looking water, partly hidden by low trees and shrubs. When about half-way through this marsh I found myself between thick walls of grass that grew on either side the path, six feet or more in height; and presently I noticed something which puzzled me not a little, and indeed rather alarmed me, making me walk slowly and with care. The walls of grass suddenly became plastered with mud—dry mud—up to a height of some five feet above the ground. It made me think of the appearance of the river banks upon the upper reaches of the Dene after the passing of a flood which had overflowed the meadows. But this mud was thicker; it was as if a plasterer had been at work upon the grass walls with his brush.

The mud continued upon either side the track for some time after I had left the marsh behind—for about half a mile or more, growing less and less noticeable until it disappeared. It was not for some time that the most likely cause of it occurred to me—that some great creature had been bathing in the muddy water of the marsh, and had then passed along the track, its body brushing against the sides. An elephant? No, for an elephant would be much taller than the

marks I saw; unless, indeed, it was a baby elephant, like the one with its mother in the clearing on the previous night; and such a young one would not be alone.

A rhinoceros! Yes, that was no doubt what had left the mud. I tried to recollect all that I had ever read about this animal and its habits, more especially if it was savage and would attack people unprovoked. However, I was glad to notice that the mud was dry, which I took as a sign of its being some little time since the creature had passed; though, to be sure, mud would dry quickly in the tropic heat.

It was intensely hot; and yet the curious thing was that, excepting in the clearings, it was little more than twilight, even at midday, so thick was the canopy of foliage which met overhead. I was glad of it, however, for I could not have walked far in the open under such a blazing sun.

I had been walking pretty steadily, with now and then a little rest, for some three hours after I had had my welcome meal of durian fruit, and soon I was hungry again. I saw no other trees of the same kind, and wondered what and when my next meal was to be. If I could only kill a bird; one of those plump green pigeons would have been the very thing. But I had no means, except my knife, of killing anything; and, further, no means of cooking anything that I might kill. As to this last fact there was time enough; "first catch your hare", as my stepmother used to say.

The want of any weapon I could remedy to some

extent, and I proceeded to do so. I hacked and wrenched and twisted at a good stout sapling till I tore it from its roots; then trimmed it with my knife until I had a neat short stick, well balanced and quite suitable for throwing. And I began to walk more warily, going slowly round a bend or when approaching any open space, keeping a good look-out for any bird that might provide me with a meal. But for a long time my caution was unrewarded.

Meanwhile my surmises as to the causes of the mud on the tall grass and bushes were confirmed. As I was passing through a smaller patch of marsh, and moving carefully, the ground being boggy and rather treacherous to the feet, I heard a violent commotion in a thicket on the right. I stood still instantly, and fancy that my heart did much the same. A little while before I had been thinking that any sound, the sight of any living creature, would be welcome in this silent lonely place; but now I feared what I might be about to meet.

But nothing came in sight. The first loud crashing—sounds as though some heavy beast were splashing through the mud and water, forcing its way through shrubs and grass—had died away, and the wide forest was as silent as before.

Then, about fifty yards beyond the edge of the marsh, I came upon a spot at which the bushes on the right had clearly been disturbed quite recently; some of the trampled grass was rising slowly into place again, and a long drooping trail of creeper was swaying gently to and fro. And from this point the

bushes on each side the track were once more thick with mud; only, this time the mud was wet. The path itself was wet and muddy, and I made out marks of footprints in the leaves and moss. I had aroused some animal, most likely a rhinoceros, from its resting-place in the marsh.

My pace became a little slower than before; I did not want to come upon the creature suddenly, and have it turn on me. But after travelling for another mile there was no sign of it, and I began to turn my thoughts again to food. Moreover, I was growing very tired and must soon decide upon a place in which to spend the night.

But at the thought of camping out a second night my heart began to sink; for what would camping be without a meal? And I had nothing in the world to eat, and very little prospect, so far as I could see, of getting anything. I had twice hurled my stick at a large pigeon, but had missed each time. It was not the first occasion on which I had thrown a stick at a bird, but I was not an expert at the trick, and a good deal of practice seemed to be needed.

Just after I had missed the second bird the track again came out upon a clearing of considerable extent, quite bare of any growth but long coarse grass and a few stunted trees. The sun was dropping in the west; after the semi-darkness of the forest this broad open space looked very pleasant, and I thought of stopping in it for the night.

And then a large green pigeon flew up from the ground not thirty yards from where I stood upon the

clearing's edge. I had just time to throw my stick once more; it caught the bird when it had almost reached the shelter of the bushes, and I saw it fall.

I ran and picked it up, rejoicing in my luck. The bird, stone dead, was plump and heavy, in splendid condition; and, comparing its appearance with our fowls at home, I judged it to be young.

So far, so good; but as to cooking it I was completely at a loss. To begin with, I had no fire, nor, so far as I could see, the means of making one. Matches I carried in my pocket; but the box had shared my ducking in the river, and, though the matches were quite dry, I had already tried them and not one of them would strike. Savages, I had read, could make a light by rubbing two dry sticks together, but I had never tried this and was doubtful as to my success.

Why, what a fool I was! Had I not got the little pocket burning-glass I always carried everywhere with me? To make a fire was a simple thing enough with that, for there was abundance of good dry leaves, sticks, and grass about. Then, too, I suddenly remembered that our English gipsies sometimes cooked a hedgehog—so at least I had been told—by baking it in clay, and I might try to do the same. If this failed I must eat the pigeon raw, and make the best of it; I did not mean to starve with food all ready to my hand.

The sun was very low by this time, but it was still hot enough to kindle a small pile of leaves and sticks on which I brought the burning-glass to bear. When

I had got a cheerful fire blazing well, I set about preparing an oven.

I cut a stout stick, sharpened one end to a chisel-shaped edge, and with this dug in the ground a hole about eighteen inches deep. Into this hole I put part of my fire, putting in also several large stones, which I collected after a little searching.

While the oven was heating I split the pigeon down the breast and cleaned it, leaving it unplucked. Then I searched about the edge of the clearing till I found a dampish spot where the dark soil was more or less like clay. With this damp soil I completely covered the bird.

Going back to my oven I now raked the fire out and placed in the hole the clay-covered pigeon, laying it on a bed of heated stones, and piling the rest around and upon it. Then finally I covered up the hole with earth and leaves.

I had decided I would leave the bird to cook for half an hour; but I doubt if it was more than twenty minutes before, eager from hunger and the prospect of a meal, I drew my treasure out and broke away the hard-baked crust of clay; with it there came the feathers and a good deal of the skin. The bird smelt very good; I tore a large piece from the breast and tasted it.

I dare say that the cooking might have been improved on, but to me that pigeon seemed the most delicious morsel I had ever tasted in my life. It was plump, tender, and well-flavoured, and I ate it greedily. I could quite well have eaten every bit; but I was

prudent enough to leave a little over for the next day's breakfast. I did not know when I should make a lucky shot again.

I had noticed a fair-sized tree still standing in the clearing, which, on examination while my meal was cooking, I had seen could be easily climbed. In it I made up my mind to sleep, as being a safer place than on the ground. But there seemed no need to leave at once the pleasant brightness of my fire; and, my supper over, I lay stretched contentedly enough upon the ground.

CHAPTER XI

I find a Friend

When I awoke next morning I was still lying on the ground, having apparently dropped off to sleep before I could make up my mind to rouse myself and climb into the tree. I was quite terrified to think about the danger I had run of being attacked by some wild beast; but in another moment this was driven from my mind; for, while I lay still more than half asleep, and gazing idly at the bushes on the clearing's edge a few yards off, I saw a sight which set me broad awake at once and made my heart jump—partly with terror, partly with delight. There, peering through the leaves and looking at me, was a face—a human face.

It was the eyes that I saw first; dark eyes, which seemed half closed, but never turned their gaze from me. Then, bit by bit, I could make out a slightly upturned nose; brown, wholly hairless cheeks, with curious blue marks on their upper part; and finally a low forehead and a shock of long, dark, wavy hair that came down almost to the shoulders of the being to whom the head belonged. The body was quite hidden by the bushes among which it stood.

I held my breath, feeling, as I have said, half

frightened, half delighted at the thought that I was no longer alone. As I might well expect, it was no white man that I saw; the face was brown, though not particularly dark; the look upon it was half savage, but not cruel. The man might prove an enemy; but I was now at the beginning of my third day in the forest all alone, and suddenly I felt as if another day of solitude was more than I could bear.

If this strange unknown being should prove unfriendly—well, even if I tried to run away, he would either kill me at once or he could stalk me stealthily. I should feel all the time that he was prowling somewhere close at hand. It would be far better to try to gain his friendliness and companionship; he might perhaps lead me, or at least direct me, to some village where I could find help.

So, though with a rather wildly-beating heart, I smiled at him and beckoned with my hand. At once the head drew back and disappeared behind the screen of bushes, though I heard no movement as of the man moving off. I stood up now and held my open hands above my head to show that they concealed no weapon. Then I called and whistled; but there was no further movement and the head was not to be seen.

The man, it seemed, was perhaps as shy of me as I of him. I would have rushed into the bushes searching for the vanished figure, but I was afraid of scaring him away altogether. I decided to sit down again and wait to see if anything would happen.

And soon I saw the face again, still peering through the leaves, but from a spot a little farther off. Once

more I smiled and beckoned; but it was several minutes before the branches slowly parted without noise, and the figure came cautiously out into the open, halting on the edge of the clearing.

I could see now that it was quite a boy—as far as I could judge a few years older than myself; I took him for about eighteen. He was, if anything, a little shorter than myself, being certainly not more than five feet tall. I saw that the blue patches on his cheeks had been tattooed, broad lines being drawn between his cheekbones and his ears.

His dress did not amount to very much; his only garment was what seemed to be a good long strip of some material, which was wound round his waist and passed between his legs. Hanging about his throat was a necklace of beads and several other little things which I could not entirely make out. Passed through a hole made in the fleshy part of his right ear there was a rolled-up leaf. And that was absolutely all.

But, though his dress was little, he had about him several other things that interested me greatly. Hanging from a loop upon his waist-cloth was a large broad-bladed knife, a foot or more in length. The end fixed in a wooden handle was comparatively narrow, but the other end was quite two inches broad. It looked both sharp and strong, and I decided that I should have stood a poorish chance if he had wished to treat me as an enemy. There was a woven basket hanging on his back; a large light vessel, seemingly made from the stalk of some kind of bamboo, dangled from his waist, together with some smaller articles

But what most took my notice was a thing considerably taller than himself, which he held in his right hand. It was quite six or seven feet in length, and seemed to be the stem of a bamboo. It was entirely covered with all sorts of small figures—squares, oblongs, triangles, with bars and lines, arranged in groups and patterns. These figures were not only coloured—black and blue and red—but seemed to be engraved or carved upon the stick. I wondered what this thing could be; it seemed to me too light and much too long to be intended as a walking-stick.

While I was making all these observations the boy stood quiet, looking at me through his half-shut eyes, and I gazed back at him. At last I broke the silence which we had so far maintained.

“Who are you?” I inquired in the only language I could speak—my own. Of course I only asked the question for the sake of saying something, feeling pretty sure that he could not speak English, and that any answer would be Greek to me.

For the first time he gave a little smile, and muttered a few words.

This was awfully irritating. Here I had come upon a human being at last, a boy of my own age, who seemed inclined to be friendly; and yet I could not exchange a single word with him, to tell him who I was, where I came from, or what I wanted. All I could do was to beckon that he should come and sit down beside me.

Slowly he did so, squatting on his haunches in a curious way, and looking wonderingly at me the while.

I was in despair to think how I could make him understand my tale. I thought that, if there had been water near, I could have tried some sort of pantomime to let him know, if possible, that I had been upset into the river and was lost and all alone. But there was no water at hand, and for the life of me I could not tell how to begin.

Still I might try to let him know my name; so, pointing with a finger at myself, I repeated several times:

“Stephen—Stephen—Stephen.”

He looked at first as though he did not understand; then suddenly he smiled in quite a friendly fashion, and repeated the word slowly and indistinctly.

So far, so good; now perhaps I might get his; so, pointing now to him, I raised my eyebrows in a questioning way.

He seemed to understand what I was after, for he replied:

“Che Tupei.”

A day or two later, when a squirrel crossed our path, my companion pointed to it and repeated the same words. From this, and also from the easy way in which I saw him climb the very tallest and most branchless tree-trunks, I gathered that his name meant “squirrel” and had perhaps been given to him on account of his agility.

This seemed as far as we could get in conversation for the present. It was a hard case, for I liked the look of my new friend quite well. He was clean, wholesome-looking, very muscular, smooth-skinned,

active, and with a fairly intelligent face. He might do much for me if only we could talk.

However, I could only make the best of matters as they were. Wondering what I could do to extend our acquaintance, I thought of my clasp-knife, took it from my pocket, and showed it him.

He smiled, took it from me, and examined it, but, as I could see, rather contemptuously. Then he handed me his own. I made signs of admiring it greatly, and then pointed at the thing he carried in his hand. This, too, he at once handed over for my inspection.

I found that it was hollow, and I was not long in guessing that it was a blow-pipe. In a case which I had already noticed hanging from his waist-belt were some very slender darts about twelve inches long. I was about to touch the point of one of these when he pushed back my hand, though gently, at the same time shaking his head in a warning way. At once it flashed into my mind that very likely these darts were poisoned. I went through the motion of pricking my hand with one of them, then rolled over on my side and closed my eyes, pretending to be dead. This he quite clearly understood, smiling and nodding several times.

By this time I remembered what the appearance of my new companion had for the moment driven from my head: that I was again hungry and in want of food. I had put the remnant of my pigeon in a bush the night before, and now fetched it, offering him some, and spreading out my hands to let him know that it

was all I had. This also seemed to be within the brown boy's understanding, for he nodded, touched my hand in quite a friendly fashion, and seemed to let me know that he would get me more. But he himself had evidently no food with him, and I wondered how our wants were going to be supplied. I was not long in finding out.

The boy stood up now, making signs that we should go. I was, you may be sure, quite willing to throw in my lot with this new friend; all the more so that he motioned that we should follow the track in the direction that I had been taking so far. But as to that, whichever way he had proposed to go, I should have followed him; my two long days entirely alone had made me fairly ache for company.

For some two miles we kept along the track, he leading and I walking close behind. He walked with a light springing step, and I particularly noticed that he set each foot upon the ground directly in front of the other.

After a time he stopped and seemed to listen, motioning with his hand for me to stand quite still. At first I could hear nothing but the busy hum of insects and the songs and calls of birds. Then a faint distant sound, growing gradually louder, struck my ears, and I soon recognized it as what I had already heard the day before—the noise and chatter of a troop of monkeys travelling through the trees.

Keeping his eyes in the direction of the approaching noise, the boy took a dart from his quiver and fixed it in his blow-pipe, placing behind it a small wad of

some soft cottony-looking stuff. Then he crouched and waited, with the blow-pipe held upright.

The sound drew nearer; presently the leading monkeys came in sight—or rather we could hear their chatter, with the rustling of the branches, high above our heads. Then the boy's attitude grew more alert. He placed the mouth-piece of the blow-pipe to his lips, holding the weapon on the crossed fingers of both hands. I could not so far see a single monkey, though I could tell whereabouts they were. But it was clear that he had spotted one at last. He gave a sharp puff, and I could see the slender dart speed on its upward way, while the small pad of cotton drifted gently to the ground. The boy turned to me with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes; then again he seemed to wait and listen.

There was a sound of something crashing downwards through the branches, and a good-sized monkey fell upon the ground a dozen yards away. It was not dead, but its poor eyes were glazing, and it only struggled feebly as it lay. The boy ran up to it, hit it sharply behind the head as a keeper hits a rabbit, and the animal lay dead.

Was *this* what we were going to eat? I asked myself. For the moment I turned half sick at the very thought; for the dead monkey looked so very human as it lay there with its slender limbs stretched out. I scarcely thought that I could bring myself to eat a thing like that. Besides, were not the boy's darts poisoned? Still, I was very hungry by now.

My doubts about the poison were soon set at rest.

The boy was skinning the poor animal with great dexterity. Then, with the point of his large knife, he sliced away a lump of flesh immediately around the place at which the dart had entered the creature's side. Stooping to watch him as he worked, I saw that the flesh round this wound was turning blue in colour; elsewhere it was red and wholesome-looking. So, then, it seemed that the poisoned portion could be cut out quickly, before the rest of the flesh had become infected.

My companion, having finished skinning the monkey, began now to collect dead leaves and sticks and grass, with the evident intention of making a fire. Here I was not a little gratified to think that I could be of use. Taking my burning-glass from my pocket, I focused the sun's rays upon a piece of dry and powdery wood, and soon produced a wreath of smoke and then a flame.

The native boy stood open-mouthed at this; it was quite clear that he had never seen a burning-glass in use before, and I could see that his good opinion of me was considerably increased by what he might perhaps think was magic power. He peered closely at the glass when I offered it to him, but declined to take it from my hand, only touching it carefully with the tip of one finger. I focused it on the sleeve of my coat and burnt a tiny brown patch—thinking, as I did so, how often I had been scolded by my step-mother for that very trick. Then, thinking that it might not be amiss to impress the boy still further, I took hold of his hand, focused the glass once more,

and made him feel the concentrated heat upon his skin.

For just a moment I was sorry I had done so; I half feared that he would run away and leave me, such a startled look came into his dark eyes. But I hastily put my magic glass into my pocket, held his hand in what I meant to be a reassuring way, and smiled at him. He cast some rather furtive glances at me, but seemed at last to come to the conclusion that I meant him no harm, in spite of my strange powers. Then he turned his attention to the business of preparing our meal.

The fire had been burning up. The boy cut five long sticks; set a pair crossways on either side the fire, and laid the fifth across them; then, cutting up the monkey into joints and strips of the meat, hung these upon the cross-bar, tying them on with pieces of fibre which he took from a creeper. A pleasant smell of roast meat soon arose in the air.

But when my new friend presently detached a piece of meat and offered it to me, it was with a good deal of reluctance that I took it, hungry though I was. I could not keep out of my head the thought of a pet monkey that belonged to an old sailor at Denmouth, with which I had often played.

But I was very hungry, and the roasted meat smelt very good. And very good it tasted, too, when, finally swallowing my reluctance, I began to make a meal. It was still better when, from one of several little boxes hanging at his side, the boy took out a pinch of something white and gave it me. I found that it was salt. In the end I made a hearty meal.

I had not long finished, however, before I realized that I was thirsty. I made known my need by signs to my new friend, making a pretence of drinking from my hand. He evidently understood, nodding at me in a reassuring way.

Rising from where he had been sitting in a squatting posture by the path he started to walk slowly down the track, peering from side to side. I soon saw that it was the many bamboos, with a peculiarly thick-stemmed creeper, that he was inspecting; he would tap a stem of these from time to time. Seemingly he could not discover what he wished, but passed on slowly.

But presently he tapped the stem of one such creeper, then turned round at once and beckoned me. Going to his side, I found him busy making an insertion with his knife in the thick stem, between two knots and just above the lower of the two. When he had finished, a few drops of water trickled out. He made the hole a little larger, and then signed to me to put my mouth to it. I did so and soon had a good long drink; and there was still more left for him.

Again we travelled on along the track for some two miles, until we came out on the bank of a small stream. Here we turned off, beginning to make our way upstream along its bed.

I had no hesitation in following the native boy. I was hopelessly lost, and to part from my companion, to pursue my way alone, would have been utter folly. He, though alone for the present, would no doubt in time rejoin his family or tribe. With him I was no

longer in danger of starvation, and should be guided somewhere or other. So I went with him unhesitatingly.

We waded up the stream for quite a mile. It was rough work; sometimes I was in the water well above my waist, at others skirting pools or scrambling over rocks. As for my companion, he glided through or under every sort of obstacle as deftly as any woodland animal. It was really wonderful to see him.

When we again took to the land it was no path or track on which we travelled for the next half-mile. The native boy just made his way straight through the forest, using his sharp broad-bladed knife at almost every step. Of course our progress was comparatively slow, being little more than a few hundred yards an hour. But what astonished me was that the boy never for a moment seemed to hesitate about which way to go, although there was no sign of any person having passed our way before.

We camped that night beside a second stream, making our supper of a bird which my companion shot. All the next day, from earliest dawn, we travelled on; sometimes through the thickness of the forest; sometimes striking tracks and following them a mile or more; and sometimes, as upon the day before, going up—but never *down*—a stream.

By sunset I had grown extremely tired; more than once I had to stop and rest, though we had slept for quite three hours in the middle of the day. My guide encouraged me in every way he could; and, as sunset approached, frequently pointed ahead, smiling

in a way which seemed to mean that we had but a little distance more to go. For some time past we had been climbing steadily uphill through thick forest. Presently we reached a kind of ridge, and began descending on the farther side. When we had gone a hundred yards or so the boy put both hands to his mouth and gave a long and curious cry—a perfect imitation of the loud “coo-ey” which I had heard far off before. After a minute it was answered from some distance down the hill. The brown boy turned to me and smiled, and I could guess that we were close upon his home.

CHAPTER XII

The Sakai Camp

From the hill-slope I looked down on a little clearing, in the centre of which a group of people stood gazing towards us. Che Tupei went forward, I behind him, and in another minute we were in the camp. The people were brown, like my friend, and wore no more clothes than he.

At first I saw no sign of any sort of dwellings; only a smouldering fire in the middle of the clearing, and some patches of roots growing here and there. But presently my attention was attracted by a sound from one of the trees, and, looking up, I saw a small child peeping from the doorway of a little hut built in a tree, some thirty feet above the ground. Soon I could make out several of these huts; they were all made of leaves and branches, and were supported on the boughs.

A great deal of talk with Che Tupei greeted our arrival, and soon every face was turned on me. Presently we sat down round the fire in the middle of the clearing. I was dead tired—more tired than hungry; but I did my best to eat some of the dried fish and

roots the people offered me. Then I made signs to Che Tupei that I wished to sleep. He pointed first to the fire, then to one of the tree huts. I thought I should prefer the latter and made signs to that effect.

Each of these huts, of which there were perhaps half a dozen, was reached by a rude ladder, which consisted of a long pole, the trunk of a young tree, across which were tied short lengths of sticks to serve as steps. I suppose that my weariness made me careless or clumsy; anyway, in climbing up the pole to reach the hut that Che Tupei pointed out, my foot slipped when I had gone almost to the top, and I fell back to the ground—fell with my ankle doubled under me, hurting it badly.

I learnt afterwards that these Sakai, to which race my friend belonged, were the original inhabitants of the Malay Peninsula; that they were much despised by the Malays themselves, who were in the habit of chasing, killing, and making slaves of them; and that they were practically savages. This may be true; all I know is that these poor savages were very kind to me, feeding and caring for me all the time that I was in their camp.

An elderly woman bathed my ankle with cold water which Che Tupei fetched, apparently from some little distance away. She made a poultice from some leaves and laid it upon it, afterwards binding it up very tightly with a strip of the same cloth which all of them wore round their waists. Then Che Tupei, as I could not now climb up into the tree, soon built a little hut for me upon the ground; and into this I was lifted. I

had no reason to feel afraid of wild beasts, for the whole family or tribe slept nightly round the fire close at hand.

During the whole of the six weeks or more that I was in the camp this fire never once went out. It was kept going in a rather peculiar way. Great logs of wood, quite ten or twelve feet long, lay on the ground in a sort of star-shaped pattern, with one end of each right in the fire. As the ends burned away the logs were drawn in a little, and the fire thus kept going. The ground between the logs was thickly covered with the ashes of burnt wood, and in these ashes the Sakai lay all night, with their feet turned towards the fire.

For the first day or two after my accident my ankle troubled me considerably, and I lay awake at night in a good deal of pain. Indeed, it was never very easy to enjoy a good night's sleep in the Sakai camp. It was only for the first few hours after dark that my companions slept; after that they usually woke up—except the children—and sat huddled round the fire, talking ceaselessly.

Just what they talked about, of course, I never knew. I did in the course of my stay pick up a few words—the names for a tree, water, simple things about us or in common use. But any sort of conversation was beyond me; so for the most part I looked on at the strange people's movements, and thus learnt a good deal of their way of life.

They were very gentle among themselves, and, as I was not long in discovering, very timid of strangers.

I never saw anything at all like a dispute or quarrel, the children were never scolded, and the little party seemed to live very happily together. But any strange or sudden sound would frighten them as though they were continually expecting the approach of foes. When Che Tupei or another man went off for a day's hunting I could see that all the rest were never quite at ease until the absent one returned. And, too, their faces wore a melancholy and pathetic look, as if they found life rather a hard business.

There were in all ten people in the camp. Che Tupei and a pleasant-looking girl—whose name was Kamin, and who, I soon found, was Che Tupei's sister—were the children of Si Baté, the old woman who had attended to my sprained ankle. Their father appeared to be dead, for I never saw or heard anything of him, nor do I think they were in any way related to the others there. These included a man named Barsep and his wife Elong, with their three small children, a boy named Ikan, and two girls, Nus and Dima. Then there was a grey-skinned old man, Yuman, and, last, a middle-aged man named Salin.

It was Che Tupei, Barsep, and Salin who did the hunting for the tribe. Almost each morning one of them, or sometimes all, would go off for the day, wood-knife in one hand, blow-pipe in the other, and a native basket slung upon their back. Sometimes they brought back monkeys, sometimes birds, occasionally fish. On one occasion Che Tupei brought a tiny deer, which I concluded was the kind that Mr. Innes had told me of—little bigger than a rabbit, with most

slender legs and tiny hoofs. It seemed almost a shame to kill and eat so beautiful a creature; but its flesh was very good.

Our other food was chiefly roots and fruit. The roots were yams, I think, while among the various fruits was a kind not unlike a raspberry which I found extremely good. What I did *not* like was the fish. A little of that caught was eaten fresh; but a good deal would be hung up till it was dry—and also till it smelt and tasted very strong, and, to my taste, very unpleasant.

Sometimes we had a feast of honey, which I understood the hunters gathered from the nests of the wild bees. They also frequently brought back some gummy-looking stuff by which they seemed to set great store, stowing it carefully away in the huts in the trees, after making it into large dark-coloured balls.

The women cooked, and spent a good deal of their time in making baskets, work at which they were really very clever. They were, too, constantly making more cloth for waist-cloths. This was made from the bark of a certain kind of tree. The bark was taken from the tree in strips, and beaten for a long time on a large stone with blows from a wooden mallet, by which process it was softened and became like roughly woven cloth.

For two or three weeks I was quite unable to do more than limp about with a stick, so that I never accompanied Che Tupei upon his expeditions. But I was not discontented, for there was so much to see; things which, at that time certainly, few white people

besides myself had ever seen, for the Sakai were then very little known. Some of the things I saw are perhaps worth setting down.

I used to sit and watch the women at their work of making cloth or baskets, and more often still old Yuman. He was extremely feeble on his legs and went but rarely out of sight of camp. But his fingers were active enough, and very clever work he could turn out.

I had already examined Che Tupei's blow-pipe pretty carefully more than once, and a very beautiful piece of work it was. As to the decorations that I mentioned, I could make out nothing; the figures—squares, triangles, pyramids—with which both blow-pipe and quiver were entirely covered seemed to me as if they must *mean* something, but just what, I could not tell. I understand, however, from what I have since heard, that they were meant to act as charms, and that the same was the case with the many similar decorations on the bamboo combs worn by the women in their hair.

The blow-pipe Che Tupei carried was a handsome one and thoroughly well made. It was, I soon discovered, of double thickness, being formed of a very slender and delicate inner tube of bamboo, contained in an outer case of the same material, but stronger and coarser. The outer casing was evidently intended to strengthen the whole weapon, and to protect the inner case.

This inner tube had apparently been inserted in the outer casing from the upper end—the one farthest

from the mouthpiece; for at that end the sheath was slit—long, narrow, wedge-shaped pieces having been cut out—clearly to make the inner tube go in more easily. The end had afterwards been bound round tightly with fine fibre, and the fibre coated with some kind of gum. Looking down the inside of the inner tube from end to end I saw that it was just as smooth as glass, having apparently been rubbed with some rough material.

While I was in the camp, old Yuman made another blow-pipe, whether for Che Tupei or for someone else I do not know; but his doing so enabled me to watch the whole process. He had already chosen two lengths of bamboo to form the outer and inner tubes; or rather three lengths, for, although he found a piece quite six feet long to form the outer sheath, he did not seem to find one suitable for the inner tube.

Finally I came on him one morning with two shorter pieces of bamboo; these the old fellow cut and trimmed till one of them was about three feet long, the second being a few inches shorter. He smoothed one end of each till they could be fitted together closely and exactly. I saw that he intended making one long tube of them, and wondered how they would be joined.

He potted to and fro among the trees near camp for a long time, and presently came back with several rather stouter lengths of bamboo, each about six inches long. These he tried one after another till he found one suited to his mind. Tapping and pushing and coaxing this, he got it little by little over the two lengths

of tube until all fitted like a glove. Then he proceeded to insert this inner tube in the outer sheath.

This was a long job, on account of the joint in the middle of the inner pipe. When at last the one tube was inside the other, the space between the tubes at either end had to be fitted with tiny wedges of bamboo to make all firm. Then came the smoothing of the inner tube.

The old man pottered off once more into the forest and came back with a large bunch of long stiff fibres, covered with small sharp-pointed thorns extremely closely set. This bunch of thorny fibre he thrust down the tube and set to work to draw it to and fro, a job which lasted him the greater portion of one day. He constantly peered down the tube and also tried its smoothness with a stick, but seemed dissatisfied. At last, however, it was to his mind.

All of one day, during which Che Tupei stayed in camp, was spent in gathering and preparing poison for his blow-pipe darts. I did not see the tree from which he got it, but the preparation took some hours. The juice—for it was the juice or sap of a tree—was heated and dried, and then moistened again; heated once more and dried, being continually stirred with a small flattened piece of wood, with which it was finally applied to the points of the darts.

The three small children, of whom one girl was little more than a baby, were rather sad-faced anxious-looking little things; but they played after a fashion of their own. One of their chief games was a tug-of-war, which made me feel almost as if I were at home

again on Sheldon front. Their rope was a long piece of rattan fibre, and they laughed quite merrily—for them—when, after getting me to hold one end while they all tugged at the other, I would let go suddenly and let them tumble in a heap upon the ground.

The tribe seemed fond of music, too; for Che Tupei had a kind of flute on which, sometimes as we sat round the fire in the evening, he would play a strange wild tune, blowing through his nose instead of with his lips. There was another musical instrument in the camp, not unlike a jews'-harp, with two strings of fibre.

And there was yet another instrument which I did not discover for some little time. More than once I heard, when the wind blew, a sound I could not understand. It seemed to come from somewhere in the trees, and was a not unpleasant wailing sort of cry. One day when Che Tupei was at home there came this wailing sound, and I made signs to my companion to ask what it was. He pointed to the top of a tall tree, but I saw nothing but the leaves; then Che Tupei, who thought nothing any trouble if he saw that I was pleased or interested, climbed right up the tree—an easy job for him—and presently came down with a large piece of bamboo tubing, which he handed me. It had some holes in it, both at the sides and in its ends, and I could make out that it acted rather like an organ pipe, sounding when blown through by the wind. It struck me that, for “savages”, it was a pretty thought to place an organ in the trees.

Although I was well cared for, fed as well as they

could manage, and not actually unhappy or uncomfortable in the camp of my Sakai friends, it may easily be imagined that my mind was not at rest. What would become of me? I asked myself. I could not go on living there for ever, but must try to make my way either to the coast or to some place inland, where I should find a European who would help me to get home.

Until my ankle had grown strong enough to let me walk I had realized that this was out of the question, and had been pretty well contented to stay where I was. But after I had been with the Sakai for a month, or perhaps five weeks—for I soon found it very difficult to keep an accurate account of days that passed—my ankle had got right again. I could walk fairly well, and practised doing so for a slightly longer distance every day. And then I tried to make Che Tupei understand that I must find a white man—someone like myself.

But, for the first time since I had known him, Che Tupei did not seem at all inclined to help me. He shook his head; seemed—or pretended—not to understand, and tried to draw my attention to whatever he might happen to be doing. Finally, when I persisted in my signs and questionings, I gathered that he was decidedly unwilling to go with me anywhere where white men were. As far as I could well make out he was afraid; and remembering what trouble and time it had cost before he would make friends with me on our first meeting in the forest, I concluded that he had most likely never met with a white person other

than myself, was ignorant of what they were, and feared some harm.

Looking back now, and putting together all that I have heard of the Sakai's treatment at the hands of the Malays, I fancy that it must have been of them and not of white men that my friend was so afraid. But the result, so far as I was concerned, was just the same; the more I pressed the point, the more he shook his head, and I soon gathered that I should never persuade him to take me back to civilization.

I was a good deal puzzled what to do. I did not think at all that either he or any of his family or tribe would actually use force to keep me in their camp; they seemed too gentle and too kind for that; besides which I was of no use to them, but rather a drain on their food-supplies. But what would be the use of my going off again alone? I was, I felt quite sure, now farther from the coast and rivers than before. I should only be lost in the forest, and I had had quite enough of that. And so I let the matter rest for a few days, in hope of something turning up to help me on my way. And before long it so turned out.

A strange man appeared one evening just at sunset, when the whole sky overhead was in a splendid crimson glow. It only needed his coming to tell me, not only how keen was the hearing of my forest friends, but also how strong was that dread of strangers in which they seemed to live perpetually. We were all sitting round the fire at our evening meal, which was particularly good that night. There was fresh fish, which

Che Tupei had caught that day; there were some yams and other roots; and there was a good supply of those berries which resembled raspberries, and of which I was extremely fond.

Suddenly, while we were eating, and the tribe were talking cheerfully among themselves, old Yuman raised his head and listened, motioning us all to silence with one hand. The others instantly sat motionless, and the younger children cowered towards their mother. After we had sat thus for some seconds there came from far away a long coo-ey—the cry that Che Tupei gave the evening that he brought me to the camp. He answered now with the same call. We were upon our feet by this time, silent, looking in the direction whence the cry had come.

In a few minutes, without any sound that I could hear, a man came out into the clearing from among the trees. I saw at once that he was a Sakai, like my friends, although his colour was a slightly darker brown. He had a blow-pipe in his hand, and a quiver at his waist; through his nose was stuck a porcupine quill, which was an ornament that Barsep also wore.

He was evidently an acquaintance, perhaps a friend; for at once there was a great chattering and confabulation. He could hardly attend, however, to the many questions of my friends, so greatly was he taken up with me; and I could easily guess that the others, Che Tupei especially, were telling him about my coming to their camp.

Twice in the night I woke to hear the talk still going on. Next morning Che Tupei came and sat down

by me, evidently having something of importance to communicate.

It took me a long time to understand what he was driving at, and I dare say that I was far from understanding all he said; but at last, when he had repeatedly pointed alternately to me, to himself, and to the strange Sakai, who stood a little distance off and took no part in the conversation, I got some notion of what he wanted to tell me, and, so far as I could make out, it was as follows.

That, if I wished to go to my own people, the white men, he himself would be afraid to take me there; but that this strange Sakai was known to him and all in the camp, was a good man, and was willing to guide me for some distance on the way which I must take. That the journey would take me at least three days; that he, Che Tupei, would go with me for a little distance the first day; and that the strange Sakai would go still farther with me, and would not leave me till I was within an easy distance of a place at which a white man lived.

Of course there was only one thought in my mind: I must accept the offer and be off. Yet, now that it came to the point, I did not altogether welcome the idea. Each member of that little tribe in the great forest's heart had shown me kindness, helped to feed me, done for me all they could—had been good friends. Now I must leave them, go off with a stranger, one who would, moreover, only go with me a portion of the way. Suppose I were to lose myself again?

But a moment's thought told me that this was

foolish. Che Tupei, I felt sure, would not have proposed my going with the stranger if he were not to be trusted. In a few days my lonely wanderings would be over, and I should no doubt be in good hands. I made Che Tupei understand that I would go, and it was arranged that on the following morning we should start.

CHAPTER XIII

The Hill

If I, for my part, felt some sorrow upon parting from Che Tupei and his friends, I really think that they were far from being glad to see me go. I had been of no use to them whatever, and they had supported me entirely, giving me freely the best they had to give. Yet, as I said farewell to them at dawn the following day, it was plain that they regretted my departure.

I wished that I had something really valuable to give them in return for all that they had done for me; but nothing I possessed was of much use. Still, I did give them pretty nearly all the trifles that I had; one or two shillings that had somehow stuck in my pocket all through my adventures; some foreign coins which I had got at Cape Town and in Port Elizabeth; a pencil-case and several little things like that. On Che Tupei I bestowed my burning-glass, with which he seemed immensely pleased; indeed I have no doubt that all my gifts are looked upon as priceless treasures still, if those to whom I gave them are alive.

When I had shaken hands all round, the strange Sakai, Che Tupei, and myself set off. Che Tupei

was to accompany us for a large portion of the first day's journey. He had procured me a stout stick, for my sprained ankle still remained a little weak.

Our way lay up the hill in a south-easterly direction for a time. The village whither I was bound lay by a river, as indeed do nearly all the towns and villages of the Malay Peninsula. I understood from Che Tupei that the river was a large one; and concluded, as turned out to be the case, that it was that broad river off which we had turned into the smaller one where our disaster had occurred.

I had with me sufficient food to last me for three days—roots, berries, and dried fish—which I carried on my back in a small neatly-woven basket given me by Che Tupei's sister, Kamin. And, after I had got over the feeling of sadness at parting from good friends whom I should never see again, I stepped out cheerfully with Che Tupei and the strange man—whose name, by the way, was Yadap.

I will not give the details of our journey that first day. At times, as with Che Tupei when he took me to his camp, we followed forest tracks; at times we would leave these and go straight through the jungle, both men plying their large knives vigorously; and then again, from time to time, we waded up the beds of streams; *up*, for during nearly the whole of that first day our route was more or less uphill. But in the late hours of the afternoon we crossed the top of a high ridge, from which we saw before us the great forest stretching out unbroken miles and miles.

It was upon this ridge that Che Tupei said good-bye

to me, and this parting with him was a worse business even than saying farewell in the camp had been. A good friend he had been to me, and but for his care and kindness I should now most probably have been lying dead. We shook hands many times, he looking at me through his half-closed eyes, with the slight smile upon his lips. I turned back, after the other man and I had started, to shake hands once more. The last time I looked round as we went down the hill and out of sight he was still standing at our parting-place; I can still see him if I close my eyes. He was a "savage", I suppose; well, since then I have met a lot of civilized folks whom I would be willing to exchange for Che Tupei.

Yadap, the man with whom I travelled, was a silent, even sullen-mannered man; but he discharged his promise well in guiding me, and I had nothing to complain of. Acting no doubt on instructions from Che Tupei, he led the way at a very moderate pace, so that my weak ankle did not suffer too much from over-exertion.

We camped that night some half-way down the hill, were off again soon after dawn, and for two or three miles waded down the bed of a small rushing stream. Then my companion left the stream and led me through the forest for about a mile, till we came out upon a narrow but well-beaten track. Here he made signs that we must part, he going to the left while my way led towards the right. I was to follow the track for several hours until I found myself skirting the foot of a solitary and conspicuous hill. A little afterwards

I should come out upon a clearing by a stream; beside the stream there was a native hut, where I could rest the night. The people of the hut would point out the direction I must take next day to reach a place called Kulit, on the river bank. Here I should easily find means of reaching Talok, a much larger village some miles farther down the river, where the white man lived.

I tramped along quite cheerfully for some miles after I had parted from my guide. The track was very narrow; but among the things that I had now picked up from my Sakai friends was their peculiar trick of walking—very lightly and with each foot placed directly in front of the other. I made my way along the track for some two hours till I reached a stream I had been told to cross. Here I bathed, ate some food, and slept for a short time. Then once more I went on, till, rising suddenly a mile or so ahead, the hill appeared.

It stood quite alone, rising abruptly out of the level of the forest all around—I had left the hills behind some time before. As I drew nearer to it I could see that it was of grey limestone rock and almost bare, with sides that rose up very steeply everywhere and in some parts were almost precipitous. There was no earth on this great rocky hill, and hardly any grass; nothing but creepers and small bushes clinging to its face. Some trees, however, grew upon the very top.

I had been made to understand that I must skirt this hill by keeping it upon my left, and that I should then come to the hut about half-way round. It still wanted

two or three hours until sunset; I was feeling fresh and rested from my sleep beside the stream, and very cheerful at the thought of being so near my journey's end and the sight of an Englishman; and it occurred to me that I would like to climb this rather curious hill and get a view from the top. I should no doubt see the clearing and the native hut, and even perhaps the distant village of Kulit which I was to reach the following day.

No sooner said than done. Leaving the track I turned off into the forest, which just there was not particularly thick, and became still thinner as I approached the foot of the rock. Soon I had reached the hill and had begun to climb. It was quite easy work at first; but the sides soon grew steeper, and my progress became slow. The rock was not unlike pumice-stone in appearance, and was, as I soon had good reason to know, extremely brittle; pieces often broke beneath my feet or as I grasped them with my hands. In fact, had it not been for the creepers and bushes growing here and there upon its face, I doubt if I should have got up at all; and as it was I had some slips and falls.

But I pushed on, and was more than half-way to the summit when I suddenly noticed that the sky seemed growing dark. Looking over my shoulder I saw that a great bank of cloud was blotting out the sky behind me, and I realized that a thunder-storm, of which I had experienced one or two in the Sakai camp, was close at hand.

I looked round for some sort of shelter, for I did

not relish the prospect of a drenching at this hour of the afternoon; my clothes would not be dry by night. Nearly upon a level with me, but some thirty yards or so along the rocky wall, there was an overhanging boulder, with a ledge beneath it upon which there would be room for me to lie. I made my way towards this refuge; but it was necessary to move carefully, and so swiftly did the storm now burst that it was upon me almost before I had reached my shelter.

The sky had grown so dark that even on this open hill-side it seemed almost night. The rain came down in sheets, with a continuous roar, and its sound as it fell upon the closely clustered tree-tops in the forest far below me rose like the surging of the sea. Almost without a break the scene was lit by dazzling lightning flashes, and the thunder crashed about my ears till I was well-nigh deafened with the noise.

Still, I was sheltered by the rock that jutted out above me; but I almost wished I had not turned aside to climb the hill.

How long would the storm last? One which had burst on the Sakai camp had raged all through the night. I did not feel inclined to venture from my present shelter, yet I did not want to stay in it all night. Fortunately I had still a little food remaining from my last meal.

In the end I stayed where I was, for the rain continued to come down in torrents until quite an hour after dark. Then it ceased suddenly; soon the sky cleared; and, far away across the forest, I could see the rising crescent moon. But I was not inclined to

venture down those dangerous rocks in semi-darkness, nor indeed would it be wise to try to find the native hut in the middle of the night; I had no wish to lose myself again. I ate some food, and would have tried to light a fire had I had some sticks; Che Tupei had now taught me how to get a light by rubbing two dry sticks against each other. But I had none there, and nothing out of which to build a fire even if I got a light. So I made myself as comfortable as I could upon my bed of rock, and presently fell into a doze.

But I slept only fitfully, and presently, opening my eyes on the faint moonlight, I saw something which effectually banished my drowsiness and froze my blood with horror. Sliding across the far end of my ledge, where it projected out into the hill-side, and a bare ten feet from where I lay, there passed a long dark form—a giant snake!

My heart stood still! My first thought was, could a snake smell? If it should scent me there was no escape. Fascinated I lay gazing at it in the faint light of the moon; a creature nearly as thick as my thigh, and of a variegated colour, partly light and partly dark. It seemed to me, although it could not really have been many seconds, that it was several minutes before the creature vanished from my sight, moving across the rock with a faint scraping sound and disappearing down the hill.

When it had gone I thought that I should sleep no more that night. It was, indeed, an hour and more before I did so, and when I awoke again the sky was rosy with the dawn. The sun was almost over the

horizon, and the tree-tops of the forest, stretching far away below, were shining with the rainfall of the night. Far in the distance I could see the silver streak of a broad river winding through the trees—doubtless the river towards which I was bound.

As I lay looking at it, thinking with no small content how near my wanderings were to drawing to an end, I heard the sound of a small pebble falling somewhere close at hand; and, looking to my right, I saw, not twenty yards away, an unexpected sight. Round a sharp jutting point a little way below me came a goat, a stately “billy”, with great curving horns and a long beard. He stopped and snuffed as though to ask if there was any danger near; but, being below me, and the wind blowing almost straight from him to me, he neither saw nor scented me, and came on fully into sight. Behind him followed six or seven others; some of them were females, two with quite small kids.

They were brown shaggy creatures, with long coats that almost swept the ground. The way they picked their path on that steep treacherous slope was wonderful to see, and I lay watching them with pleasure until one of the females chanced to turn her head in my direction and caught sight of me. The next instant she had given a loud snorting whistle of alarm, and instantly the whole troop bounded out of sight.

I ate some food, and then, determined to get to the summit of this curious hill now that I had come so far, climbed up the short way that remained—for I had nearly reached the top before the storm broke on the previous night. To my great surprise I soon

found myself standing, not, as I had quite expected, on a piece of level table-land, but on a narrow wall of rock. The hill was really a great bowl or basin, and I stood upon the rim.

The shape of this strange hill was oblong, perhaps three-quarters of a mile in length, and about half as much from side to side. The rim was far from being level, but rose sharply here and there in little peaks, while it dropped steeply down in other places, although never very far. Just at the place where I was standing it was fully twenty feet across; farther on still it was a little broader. But in some places in the distance I could see that it was very narrow, certainly not more than three or four feet wide.

Trees grew upon this rim, though there seemed hardly any soil, and the roots were often more than half exposed, clinging and twisting in and out among the interstices of the naked rock. The inner side of this great rocky basin was still steeper than what I had climbed. In the great hollow down below me I could not make out a foot of solid ground, so thickly was it covered with shrubs and brushwood.

Well, now that I had gone so far, I thought I might as well see all that could be seen. Even the thought of that great snake quite failed to keep me back—things seemed so cheerful in the morning light. I considered for a minute whether I should set off round the rim, or try at once to make my way down to the hollow centre of the hill. After a little hesitation I decided I would first walk round.

So, after getting a refreshing drink of water from

a little pool with which the storm had filled a tiny hollow in a neighbouring rock, I started off. But I was not long in finding that to walk all round was hardly likely to prove an easy job. The rim grew narrower rapidly as I went on, and soon I reached a place where it was barely three feet broad. Here, on the side that faced the open forest, a sheer wall of rock dropped straight for fully fifty feet. The inner side sloped slightly, and trees, shrubs, and creepers gave some hold.

My head was steady enough, and, even if that had not been the case, there would have been no great difficulty in walking on a three-foot path—if that path had been good. But that was just what it was not. The rock, besides being very rotten and brittle, was all broken into little peaks and hollows, like a tiny mountain range. Small pieces would break the moment that I trod on them. I kept to the inside as far as possible, you may be sure, so that, if fall I did, it should be on the safer inner slope.

I had got over some quite nasty places when I came to one still worse; there was a deep crack before me in the rim of this great dish. It was a wedge-shaped crack, and to its pointed bottom was quite thirty feet. But about half-way down there was, on my side, a large jutting piece of rock, while on the farther side there was an overhanging tree. If I could get upon the ledge of rock and reach the branches of the tree I ought to get across all right.

I scrambled down with care and stood upon the ledge. The tree had branches that were well within

my reach; taking a firm grasp of the largest and strongest looking of these boughs I swung myself across. Immediately above the tree was a large solid-looking boulder, and of this I next took hold. I was just drawing myself upon it when, without a moment's warning, it gave way and fell. And I fell too.

How I escaped being crushed to death between the falling boulder and the sides of that deep narrow cleft I do not know. Escape, however, I did; but I fell and slid down to the very bottom of the cleft, and lay there, bruised, sore, terrified to death. It was a miracle that I had not been killed. I think the boulder must have struck against some slight projection of the rock immediately below it and have bounded clear of me. At any rate it now lay wedged beside me as I lay upon my back.

I tried to rise, but found that my left leg was tightly held. Raising myself as far as I could I looked down at it to find the cause of this. From the knee downwards the whole leg was underneath the piece of fallen rock. I was as firmly caught as in a trap.

The sweat broke out upon me as I realized my plight. I pushed the boulder with my hands, but it refused to move or even shake. I tugged hard at my leg, but failed to move that. The rock had fitted down upon it in a marvellous manner without giving me the slightest pain. But I was caught.

CHAPTER XIV

Escape

Well, this looked uncommonly like the real end of my adventures. I was at least a mile from the nearest dwelling, the Malay hut beside the stream; and, so far as I could judge, five or six hundred feet above the level of the forest. No cry that I could make would carry there. Nowhere upon the hill-side or the rim on which I had been walking had I seen the slightest trace of human feet. Some hunter might perhaps climb the hill from time to time; I judged that he would be in search of goats. But it was a million chances against one that any such would come to-day—or yet to-morrow or next week. No, I was done this time; I should lie there a prisoner till I starved to death.

It was my silly curiosity to “see things” that had brought me to this pass. Why had I turned aside to climb the hill at all? or, having done so, why had I not gone down again at dawn? By now I should have found the native hut, and had pointed out to me the path to Kulit. Well before night I should have reached the village—perhaps been on my way to the white man at Talok.

I was not suffering any worse pain than the sore aching of a few cuts and bruises. By some extraordinary miracle, as I have said, the rock had gripped my leg as in a vice, but without pressing heavily upon it anywhere. The cleft in which I lay was still in shadow and I was not troubled by the heat. That was something to be thankful for, but that seemed about all. I judged that the great rock must weigh at least a ton; and, though I could sit partly upright with some difficulty, I entirely failed to move it. It lay as solid and immovable as though it were fixed firmly to the hill itself.

A noise from somewhere up above me made me turn my head and listen anxiously. Something was moving on the ridge above; was it some hunter after all? I heard the swish of moving branches, then a very faint light patter on the rocky path. In another second a large brown monkey came in sight, and had sprung half-way down the cleft before he noticed me. When he had done so he leaped backwards with a chattering cry, and then sat grinning angrily upon a ledge of rock. Each time I looked at him he showed a formidable set of ugly yellow teeth.

He was by no means pleasant company, and yet I was half sorry when he turned and scuttled out of sight. Had he gone to fetch others, I wondered? Would they come in numbers, set upon me, tear me to pieces as I was lying helpless there? But many minutes passed without another sound of any kind being heard.

Was there absolutely nothing I could do to help

myself? I recalled tales of men in desperate situations who had sacrificed a limb to save their lives. Foxes and other animals, I knew, would sometimes do so, gnawing off the foot or leg that had been caught in a steel trap. I had my knife. But no; the thought of setting to work with it in cold blood was quite too much for me. And even if I did not bleed to death at once, how could I possibly descend the hill with but one leg? I need think no more of that plan.

Was there no other chance of setting myself free?

I raised myself as upright as I could and tried to look behind the fallen rock. It had fallen below me, that is, slightly nearer to the inner edge of the cleft, which sloped a little downwards towards the hollow centre of the hill. I imagined what a rescue party would do to free me, should one by a miracle arrive. They would get something to use as a lever, would wedge up the rock on my side, and thus send it crashing down the rocky wall.

I looked carefully at what held me fast. The boulder was very irregular in shape; the side next to me was rather thin and wedge-shaped, broadening out till it was very thick and massive at the farther end. Then that far end, I told myself, must be the heavier, and a lever, if only one could be got to work, should do the job of upsetting it with comparative ease.

If only I could wedge it up. My stick! I had forgotten it till now, and looked about to see if it was anywhere in sight. It was, but not within my reach; it lay a few feet farther up the cleft, nearly a yard

beyond the utmost that my arm and hand could stretch towards it.

I lay considering how I might contrive to reach it; then, on a sudden thought, took off my coat. This was not easy in my cramped position, but I managed it at last, and, holding it firmly by one corner, flung it towards the stick.

It just reached it; but it took me quite ten minutes before, by flinging my coat repeatedly over the nearest end of the stick, I managed to move it, very slowly, inch by inch, in my direction. But finally I had it in my grasp. If anything could help me, this was it, for it was stout and tough.

I soon managed to get one end of it under the edge of the rock; but, in my cramped position, I could not bring sufficient force to bear to raise the boulder to any extent; I could do so for about an inch, but that was all. I looked about again. Lying within my reach, now that I had the stick, were some loose pieces of stone, evidently broken off the boulder when it fell. I got one of these, and, after a good deal of trouble, succeeded in wedging it under the rock, having first raised the latter by the stick. If only I could go on doing so bit by bit I might get free.

It was slow work, and the result of each lift was almost imperceptible; but I toiled on, well knowing that I was working for my life, and that it was my only chance. Little by little, first inserting the stick as a lever, and then the piece of stone as a wedge, I was undoubtedly raising the near end of the rock that pinned me down. How far I should be able to

continue this, and whether any amount of raising that I could accomplish would release my leg, I could not tell.

It was quite suddenly at last that freedom came. What had been hidden from me by the boulder itself was the fact that it was lying just upon a short sudden drop or step in the rock forming the bottom of the cleft; over this ledge, as I afterwards saw, a large portion of the boulder must have projected; and my labours with the stick and wedge of stone at length upset its balance. With a suddenness that startled me it toppled partly over, slid for a yard or two, and then plunged out of sight. I heard it crashing down the hill-side till a final thud was followed by silence.

I sprang to my feet with a wild joy in my heart; but the next moment I was down again upon the rock, for my foot and leg were stiff and helpless with their long imprisonment and cramped position. When I had rubbed them into life and use again I scrambled carefully up the side of the cleft down which I had come, and presently regained the narrow rim. I had seen as much as I wanted of the hill now; I would explore the edge no farther, nor go down into the centre of the bowl as I had planned at first to do.

I scrambled down the hill and reached the path near the point at which I had left it on the previous afternoon. A short half-hour's walking brought me to the native hut beside a stream. Brown naked children were at play outside as I drew near, but ran in screaming upon sight of me. A woman came to the door and stood shading her eyes with her hand.

Her husband, I gathered from signs, was away in the forest, cutting wood. I pointed to my mouth in sign of wanting food, and before long she gave me a good meal of curried rice. Then I lay down to sleep an hour, after which I set off again. The path which led to the village, or *kampong*, of Kulit seemed quite plain, and the woman intimated that I should reach it before sunset.

So it was very cheerfully that I resumed my march. At Kulit I should not be far from Talok and the white man. Everything ought now to be plain sailing for me.

I had been walking for about an hour, following a well-marked forest track, when suddenly, through the dense thickness of the trees and undergrowth upon my right, I heard loud crashing sounds as of some heavy creature going fast. The noise came quickly nearer, and in a few seconds an extraordinary looking creature suddenly burst through the bush and out upon the track—in fact, it almost overturned me in its flight. It just missed me by a violent swerve, recovered itself, dashed across the path, and was out of sight in a moment, though for some seconds I could hear the noise of its retreat.

I had been so startled by the sudden appearance of the animal at close quarters that I could only see that it was black-and-white, and not unlike a giant pig.

But other sounds were now heard close at hand; sounds of a man or men who were evidently in pursuit of the flying beast. But the pursuer made less noise than the pursued; he was evidently coming slowly, and was having trouble with the tangled creepers and

the thorny shrubs. Would he prove friend or foe? Perhaps I had better hurry on my way and run no risks.

I think I might have done this in another instant, had there not come from the thick forest, close at hand and very welcome to my ears, a hearty English curse, quite plainly given by an English voice. And the next moment there came out upon the path an Englishman, who stared at me with eyes that almost started from his head. Behind him came a native. Both men carried sporting guns.

The white man was a fair-haired, blue-eyed, very pleasant-looking person of, as I judged, not more than five- or six-and-twenty years of age. His skin was burnt brown, doubtless from much exposure to the sun; and his hands and face were scarred and bleeding from his recent struggle through the trees. He wore a soft slouched hat, a suit of dull-green cloth, with leggings and canvas-soled boots.

For a moment or two he stared at me in evident astonishment, and then exclaimed:

"And who on earth are you? Why, you are English! Great Scott! D'you mean to tell me you're the boy who's lost?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, wondering greatly how he knew that I was lost or anything about me; "I got upset out of a boat about two months ago, and have been lost ever since. My name is Stephen Lockett."

The gentleman—for gentleman it was quite clear he was—put out his hand and shook mine heartily.

"Well," he exclaimed, "I'm jolly glad to see you; you've been given up for dead. Are you aware of

that? And where have you been hiding all this time?"

"I have been living in the forest with some natives, sir; but can you tell me whether Mr. Innes was saved?"

"Innes; let's see. Oh yes, he was the fellow who was with you in the boat; a sailor, wasn't he? Yes, he was saved all right, which is more than most of the boat's crew were, poor beggars; but he got a crack on the head, when that apong barged into you, which pitched him into the river and gave him concussion of the brain into the bargain. The men fished him out of the water, but it was three days before he was conscious again."

"Were many of the others drowned?" I asked.

"Yes. The steersman in charge of the boat and five others were all swept away and never seen again. Those who did scramble on the apong seem to have rather lost their heads. After they had managed to drag your friend Innes on to the floating island they made no attempt to get ashore, but just stuck where they were and let the island take its course downstream. It went down several miles, beyond the junction of the river with a larger one. Then some people from a village put off in a boat and rescued them. Innes was carried ashore and cared for; when he regained consciousness his first inquiry was for you. Now tell me all about yourself and where you've been."

I began to give my new friend an account of my adventures, to which he listened with great interest. When I told him about Che Tupei he interrupted me:

"You fell in with a wandering Sakai; there can be no doubt of that, and very lucky you were to do so;

without him you would most probably have starved to death. I can quite understand your friend's shyness when he first caught sight of you, and also his refusal to accompany you anywhere near the Malay settlements. These poor Sakai have been so harried and ill-treated in the past by the Malays, and indeed are so still to some extent, that even now they are extremely shy, and will rarely risk themselves anywhere in the vicinity of a Malay kampong. I have met one or two of them—not many, certainly—and always found them very decent folk; a little dirty, perhaps, but then one can't have everything.

“ You say your friend gave you salt with your roast monkey. Then it is very probable that he had been doing a little barter with some Malays. Many of these Sakai have a system of exchange with the friendlier Malays; the latter will put salt and other things which the Sakai want in some arranged spot in the forest; the Sakai fetch it, leaving in its place various things—especially *dammar*, that dark gummy-looking stuff you saw. They get it from a certain tree. Now what white man is it that you are looking for?”

“ I don't exactly know, sir,” I replied; “ but Che Tupei seemed to hear from Yadap, the Sakai who came to the camp, that a white man was living at a place called Talok. As far as I could understand what Che Tupei said, he is somebody rather important; but I am not even sure that he's an Englishman. Yadap came with me till yesterday morning, and then pointed out the path I was to take to reach a native hut beside a hill. From there I understood that I

- should find my way quite easily to Kulit, a village on a river; and that from Kulit I could get to Talok, where this white man lives. Do you know Talok, sir?"

"I do; in fact I live there," said the white man, with a smile.

"Then do you know?—but perhaps you *are* the white man?" I broke off, as a thought flashed into my mind.

"Well, yes, I rather fancy I must be your man, for there is not another white man anywhere about for fully sixty miles. And, by the way, my name is Tertius Drake; so now we know each other and can get along all right."

My heart felt lighter than for many a day. I was in English hands once more.

During this conversation we had been walking slowly along the track in the direction which I had been following, with the native a few yards behind; but now Mr. Drake paused.

"Look here," he said, "we'd better settle what we're going to do. Have you got any food?"

I told him I had had a meal an hour before, but that the store of food I had been carrying was gone.

"That settles it, I think. Mat here and I had thought of camping out to-night, but now we'll make tracks for the village, where you can have food and a good rest."

"We're going to Talok, are we, sir?" I said.

"To Talok! Rather not; Talok is thirty miles down-river from Kulit, and we're not at Kulit yet. Of course you've not the slightest notion whereabouts you

are. We are now about five miles from the large river off which your river of the apong business branches. Talok is some twenty miles above the junction of the two rivers; thirty miles higher still is Kulit, where I'm staying for a few days. But my head-quarters, the place where I chiefly live, is Talok."

"Are you—some kind of an official gentleman, sir?"

"Yes, Mr. Stephen Lockitt, that's really a very good description of me. I am just 'some kind of an official gentleman'."

"There was a Government gentleman on board the *Ludlow Castle* who had been in the Malay Peninsula some years ago," I said; "he was Sir Alexander Hart, and told me that he was well known out here."

"Sir Alexander Hart! Well known! Yes, I should rather think he *is* well known, the dear old chap. He is a sort of distant cousin of my own; what's more, he was my 'chief' at Singapore when I came out five years ago. One of the very best, he is. Did he have any talk with you?"

"Yes, sir, he was extremely kind to me. He gave me a sovereign, and he told me if I mentioned 'Tuan Hart', to people in the East, I might perhaps find that they would do me a kindness for his sake."

"Well, Stephen, I would do you that in any case, but all the more for your knowing Tuan Hart. By the way, what part of England do you hail from? Surely your tongue says Devonshire."

"Yes, sir, from Devonshire. Sheldon's my home."

"That's good. I am a Devon man myself; distant relation of Sir Francis—chap who played a game of

bowls on Plymouth Hoe a few years back; you've heard of him? It does me good to come across a Devon face out here, I can assure you, and it shan't be my fault if your troubles aren't all over now. But mind, no more desertion—eh?"

I blushed. I had already told him something of the earlier part of my adventures, those which followed on my being washed off the *Early Bird*.

"No, sir, I won't desert again, indeed."

"That's right, old chap."

The track had led by now into a broader bridle-path, on which Mr. Drake and I could walk abreast comfortably, with the native a few yards behind. This native was a rather small but well-built man, who seemed to be of middle age—perhaps getting rather old. He had a not unpleasant face, though a broad scar stretched right across one cheek, while the ear on the opposite side had had part of its lower portion cut away. My companion turned to him now and then to make some remark in Malay, to which he would reply in a soft gentle voice.

"Are you the British Governor at Talok, sir?" I presently ventured to ask. My new friend's manner was so pleasant and easy—quite like the manner of a jolly elder boy—that already I was feeling quite at home with him.

He laughed heartily at my question.

"The British Governor, indeed!" was his reply; "no, Stephen, I'm the British Resident, which is a very different thing.

"You see," he went on, "as I have no doubt a well-

instructed young man like yourself is quite aware, some parts of the Peninsula are now entirely under British control—Malacca, Singapore, and other places. But many states are still independent; they are the property of native rulers—sultans, rajas, and so on. Now and then one of these native rulers gets a little tired of the not too easy job of managing, or mis-managing, his state; casts his eye on British territory and sees that we seem to be getting on all right; and finally decides that he would like to find how the trick is done. So he opens negotiations with the British Government, and usually accepts the suggestion that he should receive a British official to reside at his court and to advise him how to rule. Sometimes he takes this Resident's advice, and sometimes he doesn't. Sometimes his people like the notion of a British Resident, sometimes they don't; and in the latter case it's not by any means an unknown thing for the Resident to get a *kris*—the Malay knife—between his shoulders; or he may meet with some mysterious and completely fatal accident when on a hunting-trip. But as a general thing he gets on very well; his presence is usually beneficial to the natives, and is a decided encouragement to white settlers who may wish to start plantations, work the tin-mines, and so on."

"I suppose you have soldiers with you, sir?" I said

"Not I—not one. Some residents do have a guard of Sikh policemen—half a dozen perhaps; but I don't greatly care about them and would rather do without. No; I live at Talok quite alone, the nearest white man being, as I told you, at least sixty miles away."

"And do you like it, sir?"

"Well, yes, I rather do. The Raja's not at all a bad old sort. He treats his people well, behaves to me with great civility and kindness, and is generally willing to follow any advice that I venture to offer; which, considering I am only twenty-seven, while the old chap's sixty odd, is pretty decent of him, don't you think? I like the people, too; oh no, it isn't at all bad. But tell me; did you sleep last night at that Malay hut at the foot of the hill? They're very decent people there."

"No, sir, I slept a good way up the hill itself."

"You slept on Pusit Ganong! Well, you are a daring chap. I know some white men who would not have done as much, and a Malay would have been torn to pieces first. Everyone says that hill is haunted; did you see no ghosts?"

"Not one, sir; but I saw some goats."

"Goats! Then there really are goats there." My new friend turned to speak in eager tones to the Malay, and then went on to me: "What else did you see there? Did you go down inside the hill?"

I told him all about my fall and fortunate escape.

"Well, you have surely packed a record of adventures into a short time. Now I will tell you what I think we'd better do. In three or four weeks' time I shall most likely have to go to Singapore upon official business, and you'd better stay with me at Talok until then. Eh, don't you think that will be best?"

"I'll do just what you wish, sir," I replied.

“ Good lad; that’s settled then.”

Mr. Drake asked many questions as we went on, and was particularly interested in my account of the night in the big tree beside the stream.

“ You hit upon a ‘ salt-lick ’, there is not the slightest doubt,” he said. “ In places here the soil is full of mineral salts, of which wild animals are very fond, going there from time to time to eat them. The big beasts that you saw below you were the seladang—the bison of Malaya. Splendid brutes they are—I want to get a head. Gad, I’d have given something to be with you there that night! But here is Kulit, close in front of us, and not before you’re ready for it, I should think.”

CHAPTER XV

Kulit

The sun was setting as we entered Kulit, a pretty village on the right bank of the river, which was here about a hundred yards across. Most of the houses stood in one long street beside the stream, some of them partly overhanging it, being built on stakes. People were moving to and fro upon the dusty street of dark red trodden earth; men in bright jackets and sarongs, wearing caps, turbans, or white twisted handkerchiefs upon their heads; women in gaily coloured dresses, and small children with but little in the way of clothes.

Mr. Drake greeted nearly everyone as we passed down the street. He had told me that he was staying in the house of Mat, the man who was accompanying him. This house was not beside the river, but stood back slightly from the street upon the landward side. There was a low fence round it, and, like most others, it was raised some feet above the ground on posts.

A flight of wooden steps led up to a veranda which ran all along the front. From the veranda we entered a large room, off which opened a smaller one upon one side. At the back of the larger room a door led

out on a small open gangway which connected the main part of the house with the kitchen. The walls were made of a kind of lattice-work of what seemed bark, and the roof was thatched with palm leaves.

I found the floor a little difficult to walk on without slipping; for it was made of strips of split bamboo, their smooth curved outer sides laid uppermost. They did not fit quite closely, and between them one could see the ground below the house.

“Extremely handy when you come to cleaning up the place, you see,” said Mr. Drake, who saw me looking at the floor; “you just sweep all the dust and rubbish through the cracks, and then the village dogs and fowls come underneath to see if you have swept out something good to eat.”

Soon we were sitting down to a good dinner—much the best dinner I had had since my last meal on board the *Lady Lucy* several weeks before. There was both curried fish and curried fowl, with eggs, and fruit, and some rather curious sweet dishes, and excellent coffee. Mr. Drake also produced some English biscuits, with a tin of most delicious potted meat.

As I lay down that night upon a palm-leaf mat, laid on the floor in the small room where Mr. Drake slept, I felt sincerely thankful that I was no longer “on my own”.

I woke soon after sunrise on the following morning, and, without disturbing Mr. Drake, crept out to the veranda and looked round. I never saw a prettier scene. The mist was rising off the river and was drifting slowly upwards towards a line of distant

hills. The water of the stream was flowing swift and clear. People were going to the river for their morning bath, and from the houses smoke was curling into the clear air.

Presently Mr. Drake came out and took me down to bathe from a kind of raft that was moored to the bank of the river. Then we had breakfast, with a very welcome cup of tea. Afterwards Mr. Drake, telling me he had to see some village people, left me to amuse myself for a time.

I was not sorry to remain on the veranda and enjoy a thorough rest. My ankle, although practically well when I had started off three days before from the Sakai camp, was none the better for my tramp, especially after the climbing and scrambling on the side of Pusit Ganong. So most of that day I kept my foot upon a rest.

Some news of my adventures had of course got abroad in the village through Mat; and many people, as they passed the house, looked at me curiously and sometimes smiled. But there was never any crowd of starers, as, I could not help thinking to myself, there would have been at Sheldon if a small Malay boy had turned up from nowhere.

Another house stood about thirty yards from ours, and I spent some time watching with considerable interest the proceedings of a monkey which was tied up to a tree close by. During the morning I went down from the veranda and approached him with a view to making friends, but he turned out to be a sulky-looking creature at close quarters, and the way

in which he showed his teeth when I got near him warned me to keep my distance.

About midday his owner came out of the house and spoke to him. The monkey immediately put on a very grumbling discontented air, but he got up from the ground on which he had been sitting, and, still with a long fibre rope tied round him, began slowly to climb a tall coco-nut palm. His owner stood below, jerking the rope from time to time; and at each jerk the monkey grumbled loudly.

He did not seem to hurry himself, but presently he reached the tree-top and was among the nuts. Here he seemed to delay for a long time, and it needed several pretty emphatic jerks of the rope before he decided to begin his work—for it was work he had been sent aloft to do. He twisted one of the thick fruit-stems till the nut came off and was thrown down. That done the monkey seemed as though he thought of coming down himself; but his master twitched the rope vigorously to show him that more nuts were wanted. Then there were more loud grumbings, but after some delay another nut was dropped. The order to send down a third seemed almost more than he could stand; but at last he did as he was told. Then he came down himself, and resumed his seat on the ground, looking sulkier than ever.

“Is Mat your servant, sir?” I asked Mr. Drake, when, after lunch, he sat beside me on the veranda smoking his pipe.

“My servant! Rather not. Mat is nobody’s servant, and would scorn to be so. There is raja’s blood

in his veins. But, besides that, the Malays, with very few exceptions, do not make good servants; they are far too proud and independent, and, according to some people, too lazy. And after all, why should they work? A little rice, a little fruit and fish, an easily-built house, and a few yards of calico or silk are all they need to make life comfortable and pleasant. They really have no need to work.

"No; at my own house at Talok I have a Chinese 'boy', Ah Sin; I wonder, by the by, in what new way he will be robbing me just now that my back is turned for a few days. The Chinese are awful thieves, but in other ways they are uncommonly good servants; they cook and wash and keep your house neat and do everything that is required.

"I look on Mat as being a friend. He is, for a Malay, quite a keen hunter, and he goes with me on my shooting-trips. On these he will put up with any fatigue, hardship, or privation without a murmur, will outwalk me any day and over any ground, and, in his own peculiar way, is always smiling and cheerful.

"Privately I fancy that he thinks my kind of hunting pretty poor sport. That tapir, for instance; what's the good of hunting when your quarry only runs away? His notion of a hunt is going for a wounded tiger lying in brushwood, waiting to charge you if you try to turn him out.

"We struck up a friendship very shortly after I came here three years ago, and he soon began to go with me on hunting-trips. He knows the forest for

many miles round as well as I know the palm of my hand, or you know Sheldon front. So that he is an admirable companion on such trips as mine.

"But *man* is the game that Mat prefers to hunt, and he has done a lot of that peculiar class of hunting in his day. He told me some time back that, during a fairly long and, I fear, very ill-spent life, he had killed with his own hand seventy-nine men—*not counting Sakai and Chinese*; on them he hardly looks as being human beings."

"He doesn't look that sort of man," I said, glancing across the street to where Mat was talking amiably to an old man.

"No, he does not; he has the most charming manners—always makes me think of Byron's pirate:

'The mildest-mannered man that ever scuttled ship or cut a throat'.

I don't know that Mat has ever done much scuttling of ships, his lines having fallen inland; but as for throats—well, you can judge from what I have just told you. He has fought, and very possibly will fight again, both for and against authority, just as his private views dictate. That scar across his cheek was received while endeavouring, quite successfully, to save the present Raja from assassination. The piece of his ear, on the other hand, was left behind after taking a very active part in a rebellion that failed. The right or reason of a fight is a small thing to Mat; it is the fight itself he loves. And yet he looks so gentle, speaks so softly,

doesn't he? He is a capital illustration of a common Malay proverb:

'Sit like a cat, and leap like a tiger'.

And I don't know any man I'd rather have beside me if I stood in a tight place."

With these words Mr. Drake was silent, and, looking at him a few moments later, I was astonished to observe how much his face had changed. Usually there was a jolly smile upon it; now his lips were tight and there were lines upon his forehead, as if serious thoughts were in his mind. Of course I made no comment, and the fact was presently forgotten altogether.

"Well now, Stephen," he said, in his usual pleasant way, as we sat down to dinner that evening, "a question arises for consideration. Shall we go down to Talok to-morrow or remain here for another day?"

"Just as you like, of course, sir," I replied.

"Well, you being my very welcome guest, I think it should be rather just as *you* like," he went on; "either to-morrow or the next day will suit me quite well. But it so happens that to-morrow there is going to be a cock-fight here. It is a rather picturesque, if not exactly an improving sight; would you care to stay and see it?"

"Very much indeed, if you don't mind, sir," I said eagerly.

"H'm, yes, I guessed as much. But then, the following day there is to be a buffalo-fight at Talok; equally exciting, quite as picturesque. I greatly doubt if your excellent stepmother would approve of your

patronizing either amusement; unfortunately, owing to our distance from the nearest telegraph-post, it is impossible to consult her on the subject. Perhaps it is a pity for you to turn your back on a highly popular Malay sport. But which is it to be? If we stay here to-morrow we shall get the cocks, but miss the buffaloes; so which do you prefer?"

I hesitated, quite unable to decide.

"You'd better choose, sir, thank you," I replied at last.

"What about leaving it to fate?"

Mr. Drake drew a coin from his pocket, spun it in the air, and watched it fall.

"Heads, buffaloes; tails, cocks," he cried as it came down; "we'll let it go at that."

The coin pitched on its edge, wobbled an instant, and then settled with the head below.

"Tails! Cocks it is, then," cried my friend; "I'm not a great enthusiast for cock-fights, but Mat has a bird entered and he'll be the better pleased if I am there to see it win. And here comes coffee."

That chance decision of a falling coin saved both his life and mine—and very likely other lives as well.

CHAPTER XVI

The Cock-fight—and After

“There’s Mat at work upon his bird.”

Mr. Drake, filling his pipe as he spoke, came behind me as I stood on the veranda the next morning. Under the shade of a tree a few yards off was seated the Malay, who looked up and greeted us with his usual gentle smile.

He held a game-cock on his knee; a very handsome red-brown bird, with yellow legs and feet, not much unlike the game-fowl I had sometimes seen at poultry shows at Newton Prior. Mat’s hands moved ceaselessly about the creature, stroking and rubbing its legs as it lay quiet on his knee.

“He’s massaging it,” Mr. Drake explained to me; “these fellows take no end of pains with a good bird, and this of Mat’s is noted as a champion in the ring. But, from what I hear, he will be up against a tough fighter to-day, a bird belonging to another man. Mat won’t like losing, I’m afraid; however, we shall see what we shall see.”

The cock-fight, or rather a pretty long series of fights, took place shortly after noon, as soon as the sun threw the shadow of a group of tall palms across

an open grassy space that lay on one side of the street of the kampong. When Mr. Drake and I saw the crowd gradually assembling, we strolled down the street to where the "pit" had been set up. It was quite a simple arrangement; just a ring of fibre rope attached to upright stakes, the space enclosed within the circle being about five feet across.

Cock-fighting, as Mr. Drake had said, may not be a very improving sight, or one of which my step-mother would have approved; but certainly the gathering there in Kulit made a very pretty and exciting scene. A large number of men was already assembled round and near the pit; and their bright-coloured jackets and sarongs, the jaunty knotted handkerchiefs upon their heads, made a gay sight against the dark cool green of trees and shrubs, with the swiftly flowing stream behind. There were yellow jackets and red ones, and many of them were handsomely ornamented with shining gold buttons. Some of the men wore loose white trousers and had crimson slippers on their feet; but mostly the dress was the petticoat-like sarong of various colours—sometimes not unlike a Scottish plaid, and the greater number of those present were bare-footed.

Mat, who had joined us as we walked across the street, now pushed a way before us to the ring, where all made room respectfully for Mr. Drake. He had a word for nearly everyone, and was received with smiles and friendly looks. At least I noticed only one exception to this being the case; a man who, on the farther side of the ring, stood with a game-cock in his hand,

and on whose face I noticed for a moment a far from pleasant expression as he looked across at us. But I had soon forgotten such a trifle in the pleasure of the novel scene.

At least a dozen fighting-birds were now held ready round the ring. Some were still confined in neatly made baskets; others were in the hands of their owners, who exhibited them to their friends. Some of the cocks were plain red-brown ones, similar to Mat's; but there were also red-and-black ones, with dark beaks and feet, as well as one or two pure white birds, having yellow feet. One of these last was being made ready for the opening fight. From the dense crowd around the pit there rose a ceaseless buzz of talk.

The first fight was soon over, for the white bird proved a coward and turned tail at once. Then came the turn for Mat. Meanwhile, by the side of a man who, to judge from his important manner and the way in which he seemed to be giving orders, was a sort of umpire or judge, I noticed a small bowl of water standing on the ground. At the bottom of the bowl lay a tiny saucer-shaped piece of coco-nut shell. I pointed this out to Mr. Drake, asking him what it was.

"That! oh, that is the time-keeper's watch. There is a little hole bored in the middle of that piece of shell. When a pair of birds is dropped into the pit, the time-keeper sets the shell afloat upon the surface of the water in the bowl. The water runs in slowly through the little hole, and when the shell is full—

in about half a minute—down it sinks; that's 'time', and the first round is over. Rather clever notion, isn't it?"

The bird which was now brought forward to oppose Mat's was of the same colour, and was, I saw, owned by the man whose disagreeable look I noticed when we came up to the ring. The two birds seemed to me well matched, both being very lively and excited as they faced each other in their owners' hands.

During the first few rounds there was but small advantage upon either side. Brutal though the sport might be, it was still rather pretty to see the clever way in which the two birds fenced and tried for a good opening, drawing back a little, dodging to this side or that. The crowd around the pit, though thick before, had grown much larger now, and shouts of encouragement resounded from all sides at every clever stroke or feint. Mat's bird, as also Mat himself, seemed the more popular, though there were many backers on the other side.

The end came suddenly at the commencement of about the seventh round. Mat's bird struck vigorously at its opponent, which, avoiding him, turned round and fled.

There was a shout of triumph from Mat's friends, while he, a quiet smile of satisfaction on his face, picked up the victor and busied himself with reviving it with water, rubbing its legs and smoothing its rumpled plumage. The vanquished owner snatched his bird up and retired quickly from the ring; but as he went I saw again a most unpleasant look upon

his face, directed first at Mat, and later, as I fancied, at both Mr. Drake and me. He also called out something in Malay to Mat.

"Prang's a bad loser, I'm afraid," said my companion, looking after him.

"Is that his name?" I asked.

"Yes; Prang, which means in English 'war'. Not inappropriate either, for he is a quarrelsome gentleman, both in public and private life. I'm glad friend Mat has won, but could have wished his victory had not been over Prang."

There were still other matches to be fought, but Mr. Drake and I had had enough of it, and strolled away.

"Yes, it's a cruel sport," said Mr. Drake; "but I was glad to be there for Mat's sake, and, from your point of view, it is a typical Malay sight. The natives love it, and it keeps them from worse mischief, perhaps. And after all, I don't know that we're able to throw stones. What about otter-hunting on a Dartmoor stream? Two or three hundred people, twenty couples of hounds, chasing one jolly little beast. No, we had better keep our mouths shut; but I don't think we'll see any more. The buffaloes would perhaps have been a better sight."

Mr. Drake went into the house, saying that he had some writing to do, while I walked up the river bank, and presently sat down to watch a little group of children at their play.

There was a girl who might be about eight years old a little boy of four or five, and a small baby rolling on

the grass. The elder ones were playing with large bright-coloured flowers. They raised their soft brown eyes and looked at me for a few moments, and then continued their amusement.

I sat a little way off, watching them for a time, and could not help thinking how quiet and gentle their voices and manners were compared with those of English children at their play. Then presently I walked a little farther up the river-side and sat down at the foot of a tall palm. I had not been there for five minutes when I heard a scream. It was repeated, and I set off running back to where the children had been playing.

The little boy and girl were still upon the bank, the latter pointing with her hand, and both with looks of alarm upon their faces. In a trice I saw what was wrong. Being carried swiftly down the river fifty yards below was the brown baby.

For anyone who could swim as I could then it was mere child's play to throw off shoes and jacket, run to the bank a little way beyond the spot at which the child was drifting down, and plunge in after him. In a few seconds I had reached the baby and had hold of it; but the tug of the current was a good deal more than I had bargained for, and by the time that I had gripped the child, and could strike out for shore, we were already at the top of a long rapid, and were swept down to the pool at the lower end. So that it was several minutes more before I brought my little burden to the bank, and by that time quite a crowd of natives had collected.

Out of this crowd a frightened-looking woman darted, snatched the child from my arms as I came out of the water, and then rushed away. The baby seemed little the worse of its wetting, but was crying loudly from the fright.

In another minute Mr. Drake came down from Mat's house to see what was happening. A dozen people all began to speak to him at once, gesticulating and explaining. Presently he turned to hear my tale. I told him what had happened, and he sent me off to get into dry clothes. He joined me a few minutes later in the house.

"Well, Stephen," he said, "you have certainly managed to distinguish yourself in Kulit, and will leave an uncommonly good impression behind you when we go down-river to-morrow. All the village is singing the praises of your promptness and courage."

"It was quite easy, sir," I said, "and really I don't think anyone except the children on the bank saw me go in."

"Perhaps not; but you will find that the thing loses nothing by a few touches of imagination. Anyway the Malays are very much attached to their children, and you must not be surprised if you are looked on as a hero. And, after all, without you the child would have been drowned, or almost certainly."

I soon found that Mr. Drake did not exaggerate the village opinion. For the remainder of my stay I felt quite awkward under all the attention and admiring gazes which were turned upon me every time I showed myself in the street. It seemed that the small child

was not the brother to the little girl and boy with whom he was that afternoon; he was an only son and greatly loved.

The baby's father was away in a distant part of the country, but that evening the mother came to Mat's house and saw Mr. Drake and me. She was accompanied by another woman and the village head-man, called the *penghulu*. The mother said a few words, which Mr. Drake translated; and she certainly seemed very grateful, looking at me with her large dark eyes. The *penghulu* made a much longer speech, saying how greatly all the folks of Kulit valued the brave conduct of the "young white man".

For the most part the Malays seemed to spend their time in what my stepmother would have called a very "loafing" way; sitting about for hours together in the street, upon the steps of houses, smoking, chewing betel-nut, talking, and looking lazily about. But late that afternoon, a little before sunset, when a breeze was coming off the river and the air was getting cool, I did see eight or ten of the young men and bigger boys engage in what was really pretty vigorous exercise.

They played a kind of football, in which the ball, about the size of a child's head, was made of plaited bamboo. The game evidently consisted in the players trying to kick the ball from one to another without letting it touch the ground; or, at any rate, without letting it bounce more than once. For the most part the ball was kicked with the side of the foot; but there was one young man who, again and again, kicked it with the sole of his foot in such a dexterous way that

it flew over his shoulder into the circle of players.

When I had understood what the game was I tried to count how long the ball could be kept going without a break. Several times it was kept off the ground—without a single bounce—for more than fifty kicks: but Mr. Drake told me that a team of really first-rate *sepak raga* players—it was by this name the game was known—would keep the ball up for three or even four hundred kicks.

The players begged me to join in; but I am afraid that I did not distinguish myself much. The sidelong kick was very difficult to get the knack of. Sepak raga struck me as a really first-rate game and one requiring much skill and a great deal of practice.

The next day Mr. Drake and I went off to Talok in a boat paddled by four men. Mat stayed behind at home; and the last glimpse of Kulit that I got was of his slight well-made figure standing on the bank as he looked after us. Beside him stood the mother of the baby I had brought ashore.

It was much quicker work going down the river than coming up, and we reached Talok shortly before dark. On our way up to Mr. Drake's house he stopped to speak to several natives. After a few words with one of these he turned to me.

"That was a lucky turn of the coin, Stephen," he said. "The buffalo-fight has been put off to-day and will be held to-morrow, so that we shall see it after all."

CHAPTER XVII

Talok

Talok, being the capital of the State and the residence of the Raja, was a much larger and more important place than Kulit, though it was arranged in much the same fashion, most of the houses lying along the river-bank. It had some Chinese shops, and also a large whitewashed mosque. Mr. Drake lived in a comfortable, well-built native house which partly overhung the river; while the Raja's palace, farther down the street on the same side, consisted of a row of several houses, joined to each other by balconies and small gangways.

The morning after our arrival Mr. Drake went off to pay a visit to the Raja, and was absent more than an hour. When he came back he looked rather grave, and, when I asked how the Raja was, replied that he was very ill.

"But he would like to see you, Stephen," he went on; "the news of your adventures, and of your rescue of the child at Kulit, has reached him already; so he is anxious to see the hero of the affair. He will receive you either this evening or to-morrow, if he should be well enough."

I felt rather alarmed at the prospect of such an interview, and said as much to Mr. Drake.

"You need not be afraid," he said; "the Raja's manners are extremely good, and not unlike those of an English gentleman; and anyway I don't think that the interview will be a long one, for he is far too feeble to stand much conversation. Of course he does not speak English, and I shall interpret to you what he says. Remember to seat yourself on the floor of the room as soon as we are introduced. In England you would remain standing in the presence of a person of his rank, but here it is considered more polite to seat yourself at once."

The buffalo-fight, which to my great delight we had not after all missed seeing, took place that afternoon. It was held on a broad level piece of open ground at one end of the town's main street. There were three separate combats, and we saw them all.

I had seen buffaloes at Kulit; dirty, grey, mud-grimed beasts which stood each evening on the lee side of a fire, the smoke of which kept off mosquitoes to some extent. I had taken care not to go too near them, for Mr. Drake had warned me of their great dislike of white people, though they were as gentle and obedient as possible with the small Malay boys who looked after them. But the six buffaloes brought out to fight at Talok were quite different-looking animals.

They were jet black, and had been cleaned and groomed and cared for till their sleek skins shone and glittered in the sunshine like the coats of race-horses



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which I had sometimes seen—how long ago it seemed—going through the streets of Newton Prior on their way to the race-course. Each buffalo had a ring through its nose, and through this ring a rope was passed, held—doubled—by the man in charge.

The first two buffaloes brought up were led into the ring until they faced each other. Thus they stood for perhaps half a minute, staring at each other angrily and snorting, but quite motionless though not a yard apart. Then, at a given signal, the men drew the ropes from the nose-rings and stepped back.

For a few seconds more the two great beasts still stared at one another with their angry blood-shot eyes. Then, like a flash, their heads went down, there was a sudden forward movement by each animal, and they were locked together, head to head. Then they pushed steadily but quietly, swaying a little now and then from side to side as each tried to get some advantage of position. The gaily coloured crowd around looked on in breathless silence at the struggle.

For quite a minute the two combatants seemed perfectly well matched. Neither would yield an inch of ground, and any sidelong movement of one was instantly met and answered by the other. Then suddenly one seemed to weaken all at once, and was forced back several feet. The next moment he had turned tail and bolted, clearing a course through the thick crowd that stood around the ring, and with the victorious buffalo in full pursuit.

More than one of the spectators was sent sprawling on the ground by the unlooked-for rush of the great

beasts. Cries, shouts, and laughter rose as the two buffaloes dashed off in full career down the long street of the kampong, with the two owners at their heels. But no great harm was done; both animals were caught and led away, and soon a second pair was brought into the ring.

They showed very poor sport. It was soon evident, even to my inexperienced eyes, that one was very much superior to the other. He pushed his rival here and there about the ring, and scarcely half a minute passed before the weaker animal turned tail. Their place was taken by a third and final pair.

These seemed even better matched than the first two had been, both being enormous animals and in splendid condition. For a long time they kept their great heads locked together, their feet hardly moving on the ground; though one could tell from the straining of the heavy shoulders and hind-quarters, and by the movement of the muscles showing beneath their shining coats, how tremendous was the force they were exerting. One of them was, if anything, a little shorter in the legs than his opponent, but he did not yield an inch of ground.

Then presently this short-legged fighter got his chance. The head of his opponent slipped a little from its pressure on his own. In the mere fraction of an instant he had shifted his position, lowered his head, and thrust one horn into the neck of the taller beast just where it joined the shoulder. Then, stiffening himself on his short sturdy legs, and seeming to put forth every ounce of his strength, he lifted his

opponent clean off his forelegs, holding him for some few seconds half suspended in the air. It was only for a few seconds; then the other got his legs once more upon the ground, drew himself off the horn, and fled.

"I've heard of that being done, but never saw it for myself until to-day," said Mr. Drake as we walked off the ground; "it was certainly a magnificent effort. Well, Stephen, I think you have now seen enough of the Malay vices, eh?"

"D'you think that the gored buffalo will die?" I asked.

"Not he; it was a mere flesh wound, and the neck is perhaps the least vulnerable part of a buffalo. Oh no, he'll live to fight another day. That is a sight which I own to enjoying; there is no cruelty in it, for it is a mere trial of strength—a sort of tug-of-war. I'm glad you didn't miss it after all."

We passed the afternoon and early part of the evening without receiving any summons from the Raja. But some two hours after dark a native came to the veranda of the house and spoke respectfully to Mr. Drake. The latter knocked the ashes from his pipe and turned to me.

"The Raja wants to see you, Stephen; come along."

Feeling not a little nervous in spite of all that he had said to reassure me, I accompanied him down the few yards of street that lay between his house and the palace. We mounted the broad flight of wooden steps which led to the veranda running along the front of the largest house of the group that formed the Raja's

residence. Several men were standing about, both on the veranda itself and on and below the steps. They were all more or less richly dressed, and all had crises in their belts. Most of them greeted my companion civilly and with an evident respect, and he entered upon a low-toned conversation with one middle-aged man. I could not help noticing that some few men stood rather markedly apart, and seemed to turn a cold shoulder on us.

We remained on the veranda for several minutes. Then a man came out of the inner room and spoke to Mr. Drake's companion, who at once led the way inside. One or two of the natives followed us, but the greater number stayed outside.

The room we entered was, though rather larger than any others that I had yet seen, quite similar to them in style, the walls being formed of bark or latticed matting—I could not see which—and the thatched roof being unconcealed. There was but very little furniture, though I could see that what there was was very fine; especially a large and high-backed chair of some black wood which I could guess was ebony. It was beautifully carved, besides being inlaid here and there with gleaming ivory. The room was lighted only by two dimly burning lamps, and I could not see much.

Seated in the tall chair, and resting his arms heavily upon the sides, was a fine-looking elderly man who I at once saw must be the Raja. He was dressed in a sarong of yellow silk, with a crimson jacket of the same material. The buttons of the jacket flashed now

and then in the dim light, and I could see that they were diamonds of no small size. Upon the Raja's head a snowy handkerchief was twisted into a tiny knob or peak upon one side.

The wearer of this handsome dress was clearly very ill. His face, which had a thin grey beard, was drawn as if with pain; his eyes were haggard, and his skin, instead of being a healthy brown, looked grey. His hands, which throughout the interview lay on the arms of the great chair, were very thin; and every now and then I saw them grip the chair-arms fiercely as though their owner was in sudden pain.

One or two natives stood behind the chair, where they were joined by the man who had entered the room with us. The Raja greeted Mr. Drake with a faint, weary-looking smile, looked curiously but pleasantly at me, and then spoke to my companion in a very feeble voice. After a minute Mr. Drake turned to me.

"His Highness is so good as to express regret for having kept us waiting a few minutes, Stephen. As I have told you, he is ill, and not always able to receive his visitors at the appointed moment. He now asks me to thank you from him for having saved one of his people from almost certain death. He also wishes to congratulate you upon your escapes from various dangers in the past few weeks, and he would like to hear something of your adventures in this country. Tell His Highness, briefly, what you have told me."

I felt very awkward at being thus called upon to give an account of myself again, but made the best of it. Mr. Drake translated, sentence by sentence, what I said. When I had finished, the Raja spoke again to Mr. Drake.

"His Highness asks me to say how interested he has been in your story," I was told. "He says he has long known that Englishmen were brave; also that they were great adventurers; but he has never till to-night seen an Englishman at once so young and so adventurous. He hopes that you will enjoy your stay in Talok, that you will reach your home in England safely, and that through your life you may be as fortunate as you have lately been. Now we will ask the Raja's leave to go, for he must be weary."

He spoke a few words to the Raja, bowed, and we were moving towards the door, when the old man raised his thin right hand from the chair-arm on which it rested, and Mr. Drake paused. The Raja spoke to one of the men behind him, and the latter disappeared through a door behind the chair. In a few minutes he returned, carrying a sheathed kris, which he handed to the Raja. The old man drew the blade out of the sheath and looked at it for several moments in silence. The fine waved blade gleamed blue in the dim light, and I could see that it was beautifully worked. The handle was of ivory inlaid with gold, the sheath of some dark polished wood.

At length the Raja raised his eyes from the glittering

weapon and beckoned Mr. Drake and me. We stepped before him. The old man put the dagger in the sheath and held it out to me, speaking in a low and faltering tone to my companion.

"Stephen," translated Mr. Drake, "His Highness wishes to present you with this kris in memory of your adventures in his country, and as a token of his personal regard. It was given him by his royal father more than fifty years ago, when he was just about your age—fifteen. He says he has no longer any use for such a thing, and he would like to think of it as having passed into the hands of a brave man—an Englishman, a man of that great nation which has been for many years his friend. He begs you to accept it and to keep it for his sake."

I stammered out some faltering words of thanks for such a magnificent present, which Mr. Drake translated, no doubt putting what I said in better form. The Raja handed me the kris, and as he did so laid one thin brown hand an instant on my own. I felt tears coming in my eyes; he was so old, so ill and suffering, yet so kind.

A minute later we were in the street again, and walking towards the house.

"Well, Stephen, what do you think of the Raja?"

"He seems very kind, sir; but is he not very ill?"

"Yes, very ill indeed; in fact, to speak quite plainly, he is dying. It may be a matter of months, more probably of weeks, and very possibly of days."

"Who will be raja when he dies?"

"Ah, who indeed?" said Mr. Drake in the grave tone which I had heard before; "you are not the only one who is asking that question just now, I can assure you."

"Has he no son?"

"No, he has daughters—many of them; but his sons are dead. In any case the succession to the throne of a native State in the Malay Peninsula does not always go of necessity to the late ruler's son. Sometimes a brother or a nephew—perhaps a cousin—may succeed to him. In the case of Raja Abdullah the authorized successor is the middle-aged man in the yellow turban, who was standing at his right-hand side. His name is Muda, and he is the Raja's nephew—son of a half-sister. He *should* succeed, according to the old man's wishes, the custom of the country, and the desire of the great bulk of the people of the State."

"Then do you think that he will be opposed?" I asked.

"Most probably; at least I fear he will, and in a native State whatever respectable people like you and me fear usually happens. In the present case any opposition is likely to come from a second cousin of Raja Abdullah. This cousin's name is Imaum Praun; he is a very bad hat indeed, and has been banished from the court."

"Then he doesn't live in Talok?"

"Oh, rather not! He lives—well, where he can; now in this place, now in that. He is an outlaw from State territory, and liable to death without a

further trial if he's caught in it. But all the same he has a certain number of friends and sympathizers; all those who think they have reason to be discontented under the rule of the present Raja, who is a friend of law and order and to just treatment of his people; friendly to the English, too, as you have seen to-night. As long as the old man you have just seen holds on to life, this outlaw and his sympathizers will not dare to move; the Raja is too strong for them, weak though the poor old fellow looks as he sits huddled up in his carved chair. But when he dies there will, I greatly fear, be ructions."

"Will it make any difference to you, sir?"

"Well, I've already told you something of the British Resident's position in a place like this. He exercises no authority—just hangs round to give advice when he is asked for it—or before he is asked for it if he cares to risk being snubbed. So long as all goes well, he—I here, for instance—is just the thin end—the *very* thin end—of a wedge which may, little by little, introduce a better system of things; civilization, the opening of the district to white industries, and so on. When things go wrong the Resident may sometimes find himself in a tight place; for he holds firmly to the side of law and order—in this case the present Raja's side—and in the event of a rising, well—! But it is probable that things here will go smoothly in the end. The Raja may live many months, though for his sake one cannot wish it; he is suffering terribly at times, and nothing can be done for him. This outlaw cousin, Imaum Praun, may

perhaps decide that it is safer to sit quiet and to let the proper man succeed. Let's hope he will; he'll find himself in trouble in the long run if he doesn't, though he might make things rather hot in Talok for a time. Well, it is time that we turned in, I think "

CHAPTER XVIII

The Coming of Mat

A week or ten days passed without anything special taking place. Mr. Drake saw the Raja daily—often twice a day. Sometimes he came back from his visit with the news that the old man seemed slightly better; but more often he reported him as being weaker, and, in his opinion, likely to die any time. Meanwhile, I found plenty to amuse me in the place.

Rather to my surprise, considering that the Raja was so ill, Mr. Drake began to talk about another trip in search of the tapir he and Mat had lost the day that they fell in with me. He spoke of it freely in the town, and of taking me with him, but did not definitely fix a time for joining Mat at Kulit.

The more I saw of Mr. Drake the more I liked and admired him. Here was he, quite a young man, entirely alone and unsupported in this native state, with not another white man within sixty miles. There were many of the natives who were much against his being there at all, and who had tried, though unsuccessfully, to prejudice the Raja against him. Yet he went about as coolly and as cheerfully as though he

had been safe in England with policemen close at hand in case of anything going wrong.

One evening, about an hour before sunset, when Mr. Drake was with the Raja, I strolled off alone and wandered for some little distance up the river-side. I sat down presently upon the bank, and was watching some fish swimming in a deep still pool. But my thoughts were far from the scene before me. I was thinking of my coming journey to the coast with Mr. Drake, and of my return to England, and was wondering what the end of my adventures was to be.

Suddenly I was startled to hear a low call from the forest behind me. I turned round quickly, but could at first see nothing. Then, from a dense thicket of undergrowth, there peered out the face of Mat.

I was about to cry out in surprise at seeing him there so unexpectedly, when the man laid a finger on his lips and beckoned me to him. I got up from my seat and went. Without a word he drew me back into the bushes among which he stood concealed. I spoke to him, knowing that, though it was in Malay that Mr. Drake and he most often talked, he understood a few words of English.

"What are you doing here, Mat? Are you not coming down to the kampong to Mr. Drake?"

He shook his head.

"The Tuan must come here to me, to-night, three hours after sunset. I have news for him. You tell him that he come."

I asked if anything was wrong. He shook his head; but there was something in his manner which seemed

to contradict that motion, and which made me feel uneasy. He would, however, tell me nothing more, only repeating his instructions that the *tuan* should come there to him at the appointed time, and warning me more than once that I must tell no one else of his being there.

"Now go," he said at last, motioning me towards the kampong, and at the same time drawing farther back into the thickness of the bush.

He had made me understand that I was to return to Talok in a slow and loitering fashion, not as though I had been startled or alarmed; and this I did, although I felt considerably disturbed. Mat came not infrequently to Talok, although Kulit was his home; and if he was unwilling to be seen there now it must be because there was some serious reason for concealment.

Mr. Drake was still absent when I reached the house, and it was not till half an hour later that he came in and we sat down to dinner. Even then I had to wait until Ah Sin, his Chinese "boy", had finished coming to and fro with the dishes. But presently we were alone together on the veranda. There were some people in the street below us; but I spoke in a low tone and without looking at my companion, as though I were making some quite commonplace remark.

"Mat's in the forest half a mile up-stream, sir, close beside the bank," I said. "He wants you to go up to him three hours after sunset, and he told me to let nobody but you know that he's there."

For just a moment Mr. Drake remained perfectly

silent. Then he said "Ah!" in a cool, quiet voice, took his pipe from his mouth, and began prodding the tobacco in the bowl with the point of his knife, seeming to look at it very carefully the while.

"Ah," he repeated after half a minute; "right; I'll go."

Not another word did he say about Mat or his message, but began to talk at once of otter-hunting on a Dartmoor stream, and then of boating in the rivers that run into Plymouth Sound. It was quite plain that he did not wish to answer any questions as to the probable cause of Mat's coming, and, of course, I took the hint and asked him none.

After an hour or so he got up from his chair and stretched himself.

"Well, Stephen, you had better go to bed, I think. I'm going for a stroll and may be late. Good night."

And without saying anything more he went in a leisurely fashion down the veranda steps and disappeared into the darkness.

I did as he had said and went to bed; but for a time I did not sleep, lying awake in very great uneasiness. Was Mat to be trusted? Was it a trap that he was laying? But no; I knew that Mr. Drake trusted him absolutely, and I had every confidence in the young Englishman's judgment and prudence.

I do not remember feeling sleepy, but suppose I must have slept at last; for the next thing that I knew was that I was lying broad awake. Mr. Drake stood beside me with a shaded lamp in his hand. The sight of his face startled me. Merry and cheerful as he

nearly always was, I had seen him look grave upon occasion, as when speaking of the Raja's illness and of other serious things. But I had never seen him look so serious as he did now. His lips were tightly set, and his eyes fixed almost sadly upon me.

"What is the matter, sir?" I could not help exclaiming under my breath; "have you seen Mat?"

He made a gesture to silence me. Then, moving across the room, he brought the palm-leaf mat that formed his bed and laid it on the floor beside my own. He set the lamp down, put it out, and then I heard him stretch himself upon the mat.

"I am not going to speak for half an hour, Stephen," he said softly in my ear; "then I shall have a good deal to say. Don't speak till I do."

With that he lay perfectly still for about five minutes. Then he began to breathe in the low even fashion of a person who has gone to sleep. For half an hour or more the sound went on; once he seemed half to wake, gave a little sigh, turned over, and his quiet breathing went on steadily again. But I felt certain he was really wide awake.

Nor was I mistaken. Presently I felt his hand on mine, and he softly breathed the question:

"Awake, Stephen?"

"Yes, sir, I'm awake."

"Then listen to me, and listen in perfect silence," my companion went on, still in the faintest tone that it was possible for me to hear. "It is quite possible that there is someone standing underneath us at this very moment, trying to hear me speak; but I think

my half hour of steady breathing will have tired him—supposing anyone was there—and that he will have gone away by now. Can you hear me?”

He might well ask the question, for he was scarcely breathing his words, with his mouth close to my ear; but I told him that I could hear perfectly.

“Well, look here, Stephen. You have been through some adventures in the last few weeks, and have shown yourself quite able to pull through all right. Now you have got to pull yourself together for a rather bigger one than any you have met with yet.”

I held my breath for what was coming next.

“We’re in a tight place, Stephen, you and I. For me it is not altogether unexpected, and it’s all in the day’s work. But I could wish that I had not met you the other day; for had you turned up somewhere else you might have been much better off. But in that case I should not have received the warning I have had from Mat to-night.”

“Warning of what?” I asked, forgetting his instructions that I should not speak.

“Of an attack that may be made upon us any day; that will in any case be made immediately the Raja dies.

“I told you about the dispute that there is likely to be as to the succession to the old man’s throne. Well, it appears that Imaum Praun is now at a place but fifteen miles away, though on the farther bank of the river. I had quite hoped that he was not inside the limits of the State, though I expected he was lurking somewhere not much farther off. He has

been at the village where he is for several days, waiting his time. He gets news daily of the Raja's state, and he has friends and supporters here, at Kulit, and in many of the kampongs round. The moment he hears news of the Raja's death he will advance towards Talok with the men he has with him; meanwhile his party here will rise, and murder Muda and myself. At least, that is the plan arranged.

"As far as Imaum Praun himself is concerned he would be ready to dethrone and even kill the Raja without waiting for his natural death. But he is aware that many of his followers will not go as far as that, though when the death has actually occurred they will support him whole-heartedly against Muda. So he has to wait."

"But why should they kill you, sir?"

"For obvious reasons. I am placed here as British Resident to support and advise the Raja, to assist him, if called on, in maintaining law and order; and, at his death, to support the accession of the rightful successor. Therefore I am a serious stumbling-block in the way of a revolution; moreover, I should be a fatal witness against the rebels. Therefore I must be put out of the way.

"I have not told you of all this before; there was no object in alarming you, and, besides that, your looks might have betrayed to spying eyes that you had been told. But I have for some considerable time been well aware of what was in the wind; in fact I have felt so certain of the coming outbreak that I have, with the full knowledge and approval of

Raja Abdullah, sent to Malacca for an armed force to be held in readiness for an advance on Talok if necessary. Whether my letter ever reached Malacca I am more than doubtful, for my messenger has not returned. He may have been followed and captured—very likely killed.

“All that I did not know before, I heard from Mat to-night—that Imaum Praun is now so close at hand, with a few other details. In the ordinary way Mat would have found out all these things before—as soon as anyone; but lately, owing to his intimacy with me, he has been rather cold-shouldered by those natives who, either openly or secretly, incline to side with Imaum Praun. That he has brought me this important news to-night is your doing, Stephen boy.”

“*My doing, sir! How?*” I asked in great surprise.

“Your doing entirely. You remember a small urchin whom you fished out of the river at Kulit? You remember how grateful his mother was?”

“Yes,” I said, wondering what this had to do with the affair.

“Well, that woman, the child’s mother, is a sister of Prang, the man whose bird was beaten by Mat’s fighting-cock. Now Prang is a whole-hearted Imaum Praunite, and, moreover, he hates Mat—and for that matter Mat hates him. The two men are long-standing rivals; rivals in love, rival fighters, rivals in everything. Mat is a right-down good fellow, while friend Prang is very much the other thing. Well, it appears that meetings of the Imaum Praun party sometimes take place at Prang’s house. Prang’s

wife is much inclined to be inquisitive, like many others of her charming sex; the good lady listens at doors and windows, and in this and other ways has learnt a little as to what is going on. Still more, owing to circumstances which don't concern us, Prang's sister has some hold upon his wife, and makes her tell her anything she wants to know. Now Prang's sister is no special friend to either Mat or me; I think we might both be murdered without the matter troubling her at all. But one thing she is determined about—that the white boy who saved her only child shall not be killed, if she can help it; hence she has brought the whole story to Mat, and begged him to do everything he can to save your life. So you see, Stephen, that if I get out of this hornets' nest with my life, I shall owe it to you."

I could not but feel glad to think of this. Then, after all, if we escaped, some good would have come of my self-willed conduct—my desertion from the *Ludlow Castle* at Port Elizabeth. I should have something to my credit anyway.

"Then we shall be attacked immediately the Raja dies, if not before," I said.

"One of the two, it is practically certain. Imaum Praun and his party would of course much prefer that we were not killed openly; for, if his revolution fails, our murder will mean death for those who have a hand in it. They would prefer to give it the appearance of an accident. You know that I have been talking lately of another hunting-trip with Mat—and you. Of course I had not the slightest intention of taking one, with the

old Raja now so plainly near his end; but I well knew that, if I set the tale afoot, they would be glad to wait for such an opportunity; we should have been followed, attacked, and killed, and our bodies buried in the forest. For you, Mat, and me not to return from a hunting excursion would be fairly natural; it would be said that we had been killed by a rhinoceros or a rogue elephant; that we had lost our way and starved to death. So Imaum Praun is waiting for me to start.

“But there will certainly be no delay when once the Raja dies; there cannot be. I am here for a very definite purpose: to support the Raja and his lawful successor. In case of a revolution it is my duty to protest at once, and to report the affair to Malacca. So it is obvious that I must be killed.”

“And I too,” I said, in a voice which, in spite of all my efforts, was not quite steady.

“Well, Stephen, I can’t deny that your death is certainly an item in the programme,” answered Mr Drake. “You, were you spared or got away by any means, would be a terribly fatal witness against the rebels and their doings. So you can’t wonder at their wanting you out of the way.”

“You will probably wonder that, knowing what was coming soon, I did not send or take you down to the coast as soon as you arrived, and so put you in safety. It would, almost to a certainty, have meant your death. I could not go with you, leaving the Raja as he is; I could not leave my official post, even to save your life. Further, it would have been my duty to take the opportunity of sending news by you;

and, even if I had not done so, it would have been believed I had; you would have been followed and most likely killed on your way down. So that, delighted as I was to meet you personally, I could have wished you far enough away for your own sake."

"I'm glad I came," I said; "it's done some good at any rate."

Mr. Drake found and pressed my hand.

"Good lad," he said. "And now you know the worst; we'll find a way out yet."

"I suppose you can trust some of the people, can you not, sir?" I inquired.

"Trust them not to *begin* an attack upon me—yes. But I can trust very few indeed to take the part of Muda and myself when once a fight begins. Muda himself I trust; but he is not, to tell the truth, much of a fighting man. Some of his followers should prove stanch. No; the one man on whom I pin my faith is Mat; if any man within some fifty miles can pull us through it's he. I can rely, not only on his faithfulness, but on his courage. Fear—why he doesn't know the meaning of the word. And he'll fight to the last gasp for me. Moreover, he loves fighting for it's own sake. Oh yes, it will be like old times for Mat—the times before we British put our finger in the native pie."

"And what are we to do?" I asked.

"Nothing at present, Stephen; there is absolutely nothing we can do except sit tight."

"Is Mat gone back to Kulit?" I could not help feeling that, even though I had Mr. Drake with me,

the presence of Mat would be an additional consolation.

"Yes, he's gone back to Kulit; where, by the way, he is supposed by all the kampong to be lying ill in bed; only his wife and Prang's sister are in the secret of his coming here. He and I debated whether it would not be well for him to join us here at once; but on the whole it seemed better for him to return; he may be able to pick up more news. But he will be here again as soon as possible, and, if the thing seems coming to a crisis, he will stay."

"What about Ah Sin, sir?"

"Ah Sin! As soon as knives get going Ah Sin will vanish; we may be quite sure of that. Ah Sin is an excellent cook, as I hope you have had reason to agree; he keeps my house and clothes in first-rate order, and he does not cheat me overmuch. But fighting's not at all in Ah Sin's line. It will not do to reckon upon him for help. And now you'd better go to sleep. If I could have kept you out of this I would have done so; but it was kinder now to tell you of your danger than to let it take you unawares; you're not a child. We'll find some way to diddle Imaum Praun and all his friends; or, if the worst comes to the worst, why, Stephen, I suppose you and I can die like Devon men. Good night."

But it was long, as may be well imagined, till I fell asleep. I had been nearly drowned and nearly starved; had found friends, got through all my troubles, only, as seemed too likely, to be murdered in the end. What could we do against so many—Mr. Drake and

Mat and I—a boy? No, it was hardly likely that I should ever stand on Sheldon front again.

One thing consoled me greatly; but for my coming, for the chance of my saving the child at Kulit, Mr. Drake might have been taken wholly unawares. So that my wanderings had done some good after all. And it was with this thought that by and by I fell asleep.

When I awoke next morning it was to find Mr. Drake at my bedside, with a cup of tea and some biscuits in his hand. Upon his face there was his usual cheerful smile.

“You are not well this morning, Stephen,” was his greeting, “and are going to stay in bed. I think you got a touch of sun yesterday; probably careless, going out without your hat.”

“*I feel* quite well, sir,” I answered in considerable surprise.

“Do you? Well, anyway, that is what I’ve told Ah Sin, who will soon put the news about for me. You see, Stephen,” he went on, setting down my breakfast at my side, “I don’t want you about the place to-day, and this will be a good excuse to keep indoors. For one thing, I hear that the old Raja is at his last gasp; also, after all I told you last night, it would be quite impossible for you, brave though I know you are, to be certain of keeping a steady face. The slightest unexpected sound behind you, any sudden movement, you would start—quite naturally—and very likely give the show away. So stay in bed, like a good fellow, and I’ll bring you in a book.”

I could not help seeing the prudence of this plan, although I was not greatly taken with the thought of staying in the house alone; but of course I agreed.

I never knew a day that passed more slowly, but night came at last. Mr. Drake, who had been in and out frequently all day, came home to dinner. I was pronounced "better", and allowed to join him in the outer room. After the meal was over he took out his pair of sporting rifles from their cases, examined them carefully, and loaded them, finally putting several cartridges in his coat pockets. Then he opened a locked box and produced a pair of revolvers.

"Ever fire one of these things, Stephen?" he asked me.

I told him I had fired a friend's pistol once or twice at home, but that was all. He showed me how to aim and level, and explained the mechanism.

"It's not quite so easy as it looks," he said; "but a bad shot may chance to prove more useful than no shot at all. So put this fellow in your pocket, and I'll take the other one."

I asked him if he thought that Mat would come again that night.

"It's hardly possible," was his reply. "He would have all his work cut out to reach Kulit by daybreak this morning, and would need some rest. Besides, he may decide to wait more news."

But Mat proved better than our hopes. We had both gone to bed as usual, although Mr. Drake had told me he did not intend to sleep; he would keep

watch. A little before dawn I woke to find the hunter in the room.

Mat's feet and legs were mud-stained, and his sarong wet and torn; it looked as if he had been travelling fast and by rough ways. There was the usual gentle smile upon his lips; but every now and then his fingers wandered to the handle of his kris, and even I could see the light of coming battle in his eyes. His presence with us gave me courage. If we were to die I felt I might be very sure that others would die too.

CHAPTER XIX

The Raja's Kris

I sat listening while Mr. Drake and Mat talked together in low tones, the former now and then turning to translate something to me. Mat had been on foot all night. Feeling certain that the main path between Kulit and Talok would be watched by spies of Imaum Praun, he had first crossed the river and then travelled down on the left bank, swimming across again a mile above Talok. Yet he was not obviously tired, and seemed fully ready for whatever might come next.

Fortunately Ah Sin, Mr. Drake's Chinese servant, did not sleep in the house, but in that of a relative, a shopkeeper of the kampong; so that Mr. Drake was able to go to the kitchen and secure some food for Mat. But it was highly desirable that the arrival of the hunter in the town should be kept secret from everyone but our two selves; and it was decided that he must not leave the bedroom, and that Ah Sin, when he arrived next morning, must be kept from entering the room.

Mr. Drake wanted Mat to take the fellow pistol to the one which he had given me. But the Malay declined it, intimating that he preferred trusting solely

to his kris; and he caressed that weapon with a gleam in his dark eyes which I should have found decidedly unpleasant had he not been on our side.

I too had put in my belt the handsome kris presented to me by the dying Raja. In describing it I do not think I mentioned that, like nearly all Malay krises, it had a waved blade—not smooth like that of a sword or ordinary English knife, but crossed by waves or undulations. There were exactly thirteen of these waves on mine.

I must admit that I had no idea of how I should employ it if we were attacked. To fire a pistol at an enemy was one thing; but deliberately to stab him with a knife seemed a dreadful business. Still, if we got away I did not want to lose the kris; while, in case of the worst, it might just possibly prove useful in some unexpected way. So, as I say, I stuck it firmly in my trousers belt.

Morning came at last, and the greater part of the day passed, so far as we were concerned, as others had lately done, except that Mr. Drake and I did not both leave the house together. The former paid his usual visit to the palace, but returned almost at once without having seen the Raja, who, he was informed, was now unconscious. Moreover, he brought word of what I could indeed see for myself from the veranda; that the kampong was unusually full of people, many strangers being evidently in the town. There was an air of restlessness about that perhaps was only natural with the Raja now so near his end; but it did not make us feel the more secure.

We had to go a little short of food that day. Mat remained hidden in the bedroom, and it would not have done to risk rousing Ah Sin's curiosity and suspicions by ordering larger quantities for our meals. So that three portions had to be made out of two, though neither Mr. Drake nor I much minded that.

About an hour after sunset, while we were at dinner, there arose a sudden noise outside; people seemed running to and fro in an excited way, and a great sound of cries and wailing came from the palace a short distance down the street.

Mr. Drake laid down his napkin and got up from his chair.

"That no doubt means that the old man is dead," he said quietly.

"Are you going out, sir?" I asked, seeing him take his hat.

"Yes, I must go and see. To take no notice would seem strange; it would be certain to arouse suspicion that I was expecting something to go wrong. It would be worse than useless to show any sign of fear. I won't be longer out than I can help; go in to Mat and stay with him till I return." So saying he disappeared.

A quarter of an hour passed, while Mat and I sat waiting, listening to the confused sounds outside. Then came the noise of hasty feet on the veranda steps, and Mr. Drake sprang through the door. As he entered I could see blood flowing from a long scratch down one side of his neck.

"You're wounded, sir!" I cried, while Mat uttered an exclamation in Malay.

"A little; nothing but a scratch, although it was a pretty narrow shave for being more. The fellow tried to get me in the shoulder, but he missed his stroke and went too high. Here, Stephen, get a handkerchief and bind it up for me; I'll show you how."

While, under his instructions, I bound up the wound, he told us the news. The Raja was dead; the street was thronged with strangers to the town, among whom he felt sure that he had recognized Prang; and, as he was returning from the palace and had almost reached the house, a man had sprung out suddenly upon him from the shelter of a tree-trunk and struck at him with a kris. The man's face had been muffled, but he felt inclined to think that it was Prang. As he said this I saw a very evil gleam in Mat's dark eyes.

"Of course I cannot take a mere attack on me as being the outbreak of rebellion," Mr. Drake went on; "I have no proof that it was anything more than a private attempt at assassination. If it was daytime I should go at once to the Raja Muda and report the matter to him; but to go out again to-night would be only inviting another attempt. No, we must watch all night and wait to see what morning brings; that is, if we are not meanwhile attacked. It may be that my real duty is to go at once to Muda and offer him support; but that would mean either leaving you here or taking you with me, and I don't think either course is to be recommended for your health. So, for the present, we will just sit tight."

"I suppose we could not get away?" I asked.

“Extremely doubtful,” answered Mr. Drake; “besides, I really cannot leave the town. In theory I have only been attacked by some chance assassin, although I have not the least doubt that my assailant was one of Imaum Praun’s party and that the thing was planned. But I should be justified in retiring only if an organized attack were made upon me; if that should happen we will get away—if possible.”

Mr. Drake had closed the house-door on coming in, and had secured it with a wooden bar which fitted into holes in either post. It gave some feeling of security; but I had only to look at the slight flimsy door and walls to realize how very little chance we had of holding out for any length of time if an attack were made upon us. We were most certainly in a tight place.

About an hour later came a gentle sound outside the door. Mr. Drake went to it and called out, asking who was there. On getting a reply he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and hastily removed the bar. At once there entered the Malay whom I had noticed standing close beside the Raja on the evening of my interview. It was the new Raja, Muda, and he was alone.

I took him to be a man of about forty-five, clean-shaven, with a not unpleasant face. But even I could guess that he was far from being the equal of the old man who was now lying dead. His dark eyes had a restless, almost frightened look; his fingers fidgeted about his lips, and his whole manner showed uncertainty and alarm.

For half an hour Mr. Drake talked in low tones in the main room, while I remained with Mat. Then Mr. Drake came in to us. There was a queer smile on his face.

"Well," he said, "perhaps I should have gone to Muda; as I didn't do so he has come to us, and, what is more, he doesn't seem at all inclined to go away. I wish to goodness he had kept in his own house—or taken up his quarters in the palace, if he liked. By coming here he has enabled Imaum Praun and his rascals to concentrate their attack—if they are going to make one, as there can be very little doubt they are. They've got the lawful Raja, you, and me all cooped within the same four walls, and can exterminate the lot of us—that is, if they will set about their business in the proper way, and there is just the chance they won't. One thing's quite clear—that Muda's in a holy funk."

"What has he come here for?" I asked.

"Ostensibly to consult with me," said Mr. Drake. "According to custom his accession as Raja should be proclaimed to-morrow morning from the palace steps; and Muda wants to know if I think this advisable, or whether, owing to the obvious excitement in the place, and the presence of many strangers, it had better be postponed. Of course he must not think of delaying the ceremony; that would be admitting that we are afraid of a row. He must be proclaimed to-morrow, and I must be beside him. But if he is proclaimed I hope he'll show a better face than he is wearing at present. It is ridiculous of him to come to me in

this way, quite alone and in secret. It shows that he is afraid, and, too, it will be certain to offend his friends, some of whom should have been asked to accompany him. Of course he has been watched between his house and this. People will say that he is afraid, and they'll say no more than the truth. Come out and talk to him, Mat; and, Stephen, you can come as well."

We went into the outer room, where the new Raja sat alone. I could see that Mr. Drake had truly said that Muda was afraid. His eyes were never still, but wandered furtively from side to side. He started at the slightest sound, and his dark face was an unhealthy-looking grey.

Mat greeted him with all appearance of respect, and forthwith entered into conversation with him in Malay. I sat and watched them as they talked with Mr. Drake. The longer the three men talked the stronger and clearer grew the look of contempt in the old hunter's eyes. Presently he turned to Mr. Drake with a perceptible shrug of his shoulders.

"Mat wants him to go back boldly to his house, taking us with him, and to summon the court officials and the most trusty of his supporters to make arrangements for to-morrow's ceremony," Mr. Drake explained to me. "Unfortunately Muda much prefers remaining here until daybreak. He's greatly in the way; his presence may bring on an attack at any moment."

We had good proof of that. Hardly were the words out of Mr. Drake's mouth when the attack he had

foreseen was made. A sudden uproar broke out in the street below—cries, shouts, the noise of rushing feet. Then the house trembled with the rush of men who swarmed on the veranda, and there was a heavy blow upon the door. It quivered, but the bar held firm. Mat drew his kris and I saw fire in his eyes. Mr. Drake went firmly to the door and shouted out a question in Malay.

The only answer was a clamour of voices which no one could mistake for being friendly, followed by the crash of weapons on the door. Mr. Drake took one of his rifles from a corner of the room.

"The house is no doubt surrounded," he said quietly; "all we can do is to give them a volley when the door gives way, as it must do in a minute, and then try to cut our way through. But it's a poor chance I'm afraid."

He paused for a moment, seeming to think deeply, and then added:

"Stephen, I wonder if I could induce them to make terms for you; there's no reason for your losing your life needlessly."

"Oh no, sir, please don't try," I answered earnestly; "even if they should promise anything they very likely wouldn't keep their word." I felt quite sure that I would rather die than be left friendless to this mob of savage angry men.

"Yes, I am afraid that's true," Mr. Drake answered after a moment's thought; "well, it's we three together, then. Whatever happens, try to keep as close as possible to me."

“What about the boat, sir?” I said suddenly; “could we not perhaps get off in that?”

“We might—if it’s still there; they may have cut it loose; and anyway it means a rush across the gangway. But it’s not a bad idea; at any rate we can but try.”

I have said that Mr. Drake’s house was built with its back to the river, and close to the edge of the bank; in fact the greater part of the room used as a kitchen actually projected over the water, being supported on stout upright posts placed in the side of the bank or in the stream itself. From the short gangway or open passage which connected the kitchen with the main part of the house—a passage which had a thin flimsy roof, but no side walls—a wooden ladder led down to the bathing-raft. Beside the raft was moored Mr. Drake’s good-sized boat, in which he usually travelled to such kampongs on the river-side as were under the rule of the Raja of Talok. It was in this boat he and I had come down from Kulit.

Something had to be decided on, for the door would soon give way before the blows that were being showered upon it. Then suddenly the battering ceased, and there was an almost perfect silence on the veranda outside.

“Now, what’s their dodge, I wonder?” said Mr Drake.

We were not long in finding out. Smoke began to curl into the room through the interstices of the bamboo flooring, and we could hear the crackle of flames below.

“I thought as much,” exclaimed the Resident;

“they’re going to smoke us out. They’ve lit a fire underneath the house, and in half a minute the whole place will be blazing.”

There was no time to spare. Smoke eddied round the room in stifling clouds, the place was unbearably hot, and flames shot upwards from the floor.

“Now—all together for the boat,” shouted Mr. Drake, “keep close to me, Stephen.”

We dashed to the back door of the house, Mr. Drake flung down the bar with which it had already been secured, and we rushed through in a body.

The moment that we reached the open passage there went up a shout from either side; plainly our foes had reckoned on our trying that way, and were upon the watch. It was useless to think further of the boat, even if it were still in place. But happily the passage was a short one, little more than eight or ten feet long. A shot or two was fired at us, but we took it with a rush, and in an instant were inside the kitchen door. One man at least had sprung on the veranda and was close behind. Mat came last through the door; I saw him turn on our pursuer, saw the gleam of his drawn kris and one swift movement of his arm; there was a gasping cry and the sound of a fall. Then Mat sprang in and closed the door.

“They will break in in half a minute,” said Mr. Drake; “we must prepare to make a stand here or else think of something else.”

To make quite clear what followed it is necessary to explain the way in which the room was built. There were no windows in the walls, nor any door

beside the one through which we had entered; light and air came through the gables of the rather curiously constructed roof. These gables were opposite, one facing towards the main portion of the house, the other towards the river, which it greatly overhung; and the walls of the gable-ends were carried up no higher than the two side-walls, a large space being thus left open between the top of the end-walls and the ridge-point of the roof. These end-walls were perhaps eight feet high.

I pointed to the open space above the wall which overhung the stream.

"Could we get out that way, sir?" I asked Mr. Drake.

His eyes followed the direction of my hand and he gave a low whistle.

"What! Dive and swim for it?" he said; "d'you think you could?"

"*I* could," I said, "and so could you and Mat"—I had good cause to know that both were excellent swimmers—"then we might find a boat."

"Well, it's rather a desperate plan, but it seems that or nothing," answered Mr. Drake; "we must take Muda with us, whether he can swim or not; I have my doubts about that. Come on."

We all rushed for the wall, Mat hurrying the Raja beside him. But, even as we turned, the door burst open with a crash, and in an instant the small room was full of men. They were upon us in an instant, shouting, grappling with us, stabbing with their knives. I heard a shot close beside me from Mr. Drake's

pistol; that put me in mind of the one I carried in my pocket, and I drew it out. But at that moment someone fell against me, almost threw me off my feet, and the weapon was jerked from my hand to the floor. Hardly knowing what I did I drew out from my belt the Raja's kris, unsheathing it. Immediately behind me I could hear the Raja Muda breathing heavily.

Mr. Drake fired again, and there were shots from our pursuers. But we had some advantage in this respect: that while we were somewhat concealed by the semi-darkness of the room, our enemies were seen against the open door, and in the light of the now blazing house. A third time Mr. Drake fired, and I clearly saw a man throw up his arms and fall.

Out of the crowd of figures a tall man rushed forward towards the Raja Muda and myself. Almost involuntarily I thrust the kris in front of me as some protection; as I did so my feet slipped on the bamboo floor, and I fell heavily upon my back. The man tripped on my prostrate figure, crashed upon me as I lay, and gave a curious grunting cry. Then I believe that I lost consciousness for a few seconds, though I can remember thinking that the end had surely come.

A little later I became aware that I was still lying on the ground, with the man's prostrate figure motionless upon my own. My hand still grasped my kris; when I tried to move, the kris seemed difficult to draw away. There was, too, something warm and moist upon my fingers, but I did not think of what it was. I wriggled from beneath the weight that lay upon

me, and looked round. In the flickering light two well-known faces caught my eye at once.

Prang lay upon the floor two yards away, and over him stooped Mat. The latter's one hand grasped his kris, the other held Prang firmly by the throat. Just then the flames of the burning house flared up, the light shone brightly through the kitchen doorway, and lit up the face I knew so well. I saw a look of utter terror on Prang's evil-features, and fierce vengeance shining in Mat's eyes. I heard the hunter say some words with great distinctness to his victim; then, most deliberately, and seeming to select the spot with care, he plunged his blade deep in Prang's shoulder. A spasm swept over the Malay's face, his body gave a shudder, then was still.

The next moment I was half dragged, half lifted to my feet by a hand under my arm; it was that of Mr. Drake.

"Now for it, Stephen; they have given back a little and it is our only chance. Up the wall, lad, for your life, and pull the Raja up."

He placed a hand under my foot, gave a quick heave, and I was seated on the gable wall.

"Now give the Raja a hand."

Leaning over from my seat, with the wall swaying ominously at each movement, I hauled the heavy figure of the Raja Muda up beside me, Mr. Drake and Mat assisting from below. Then followed Mr. Drake, and lastly Mat, both springing up like cats.

But Mat was the last straw. The wall swayed, buckled, and gave way. Fortunately, on the whole,

it fell outwards, and we were all four in the river, safe for the moment from pursuit.

Rising to the surface, I made out a figure swimming some few yards away, hailed it, and found that it was Mr. Drake.

"Keep near me, Stephen," he exclaimed in a low tone; "Mat has got Muda and he'll do the best for him he can; we're better to be two and two. Just let yourself be carried by the current for the present, but keep near the bank and then we shan't be seen."

We swam together, letting ourselves be carried by the current, and without a sound. We heard men rushing to and fro upon the bank, shouting; but we had soon travelled quite a hundred yards to a point where the houses ceased and the river-bank was thickly fringed with overhanging trees. And presently the current, rather swift immediately behind the house, had brought us to a broad deep pool. Here Mr. Drake steered towards the bank, on which there was no sound of any kind. A minute later we touched bottom under the thick shadow of some trees, and stood upright, though up to our necks in water. For the moment we seemed safe.

"Well, we have got away so far at any rate. You are not hurt?" added Mr. Drake anxiously.

"No, sir, I'm quite all right; are you?"

"Yes, not a scratch—quite sound. I only hope that Mat and Muda have had equally good luck; I saw them both together in the water, but the Raja is a rather heavy load to steer. But, as to that, all four of us are still a good deal up a tree."

"At any rate Prang's dead," I said; "Mat killed him with his kris."

"Yes, so I saw," answered Mr. Drake, and added: "Mat has settled a long-standing score. And *you* made an end of one of Imaum Praun's chief fellows; it was the loss of him and Prang that made the other men give back a little and provide us with the opportunity to get away."

"I—I killed no one," I exclaimed.

"Oh yes, you did; not perhaps deliberately. This chap—his name was Moussa—tried to get at Muda, but you happened to be in the way. You went down backwards and he tripped and fell upon you, falling on the point of your kris. That settled him; the whole thing was over in a moment, and I saw it all. Where is your kris—lost, I'm afraid?"

But I had kept it, almost without knowing it, in my belt. The river had washed it clean of Moussa's blood; but I looked at it with a sort of fear. It was a dreadful feeling—to have killed a man. But in a moment I had something else to think of.

"Hark, Stephen! What is that?" said Mr. Drake in a low tone.

I listened, but at first heard nothing but the flowing river and the shouting in the now distant kampong. Then I was conscious of a sound, very faint at first, but regular, and steadily growing more and more distinct. It was a steady thud-thud-thud.

"A river gunboat!" almost shouted Mr. Drake; "by Jove, my message must have got through after all."

Slowly and steadily the sound came nearer; soon it was quite distinct as being the noise of paddle-wheels. And presently, against the dark gleam of the water, we could see an object come in sight some way downstream.

"We'll swim to her," said Mr. Drake, and we pushed out across the current.

In a few minutes we were within hail; a boat was towing at the gunboat's stern. Willing hands helped us upon deck; and there, among a crowd of curious bluejackets and marines, we met Mat and the Raja Muda. They had found a boat in which to get away, and had been picked up by the gunboat half a mile below our hiding-place.

CHAPTER XX

Conclusion

The coming of the gunboat took the rebels wholly by surprise; for though their leader, Imaum Praun, had taken the precaution to post scouts below the town, these men, attracted by the seeming success of the attack, and anxious to join in the fight and share in any loot, had left their posts. An officer and a strong party of marines, guided by Mr. Drake, Mat, and Muda, landed a little way below the town; and the next thing that the insurgents were aware of was the entry of the marines to the kampong and one swift charge that swept the street. Much as I should have liked to see the fun, I did not do so. Mr. Drake insisted on my staying safe on board the boat.

When morning broke the rebels were entirely dispersed, and Imaum Praun a prisoner in the Raja's hands. There was short shrift for him. He was an outlaw on account of a previous rebellion; moreover, he was already under sentence of death for a particularly cruel murder. Muda seemed undecided, but Mr. Drake was firm for his immediate execution, judging, I should think quite rightly, that it would be a warning

for the rest. So at midday, immediately following the proclamation of the Raja Muda's accession to the throne, Imaum Praun was brought out to the middle of the kampong street and executed in native fashion by being stabbed with a kris.

"It is but just," said Mr. Drake to me; "he's played his little game and lost; he's got to pay."

Mat made a characteristic comment on the whole affair, speaking in halting English, with a smile:

"It was one good fight—yes!"

The gunboat lay for a week before the town, a Maxim pointed at the place. But the people seemed to have learned a lesson; Imaum Praun, Moussa, Prang were dead; others of the rebels had been captured, only a few having succeeded in escaping. The townspeople were thoroughly cowed, and the greater number seemed entirely contented with the accession of the Raja Muda to the throne. So, when the week was up, the boat set off down-stream, with Mr. Drake and myself on board upon our way to Singapore.

At Singapore a great to-do was made of me—more, certainly, than I deserved. But Mr. Drake recounted to the Governor and others the story of my strange adventures, and laid great stress on my saving the baby at Kulit and the consequent discovery of the plot for the assassination of himself and Muda. Indeed, he further insisted that the Raja owed his life to me, saying that he would undoubtedly have been killed by Moussa had not the latter chanced to stumble on my prostrate form. So I was in danger of being made to feel a sort of hero. But I was aware that anything that I had done

was quite by chance, and that there was at least one event in my adventures — my desertion from the *Ludlow Castle* — of which I had no reason to be proud.

A cruiser was lying at Singapore, on the point of returning to England. Her commander was well known to Mr. Drake, and it was arranged between them that I was to have a passage home in her. This got me out of a decided difficulty; for I had no money, and, though I could no doubt have borrowed from the many people who were kind to me, I neither wished to be under an obligation to them nor to involve my father in expense. Ten days after reaching Singapore I said good-bye to Mr. Drake and sailed for England.

I had a very happy time on board and was quite sorry to leave the ship at Plymouth. Two hours later I was once again on Sheldon front.

There I had much to tell—and hear, as may be thought. My stepmother had given me up for dead; but my father's more hopeful nature had persisted that I should in time "come through all right". Happily for their peace of mind, the trawler's engines had gone wrong the day following that on which I was washed overboard; she was in consequence several days late in reaching Plymouth, and even while Captain Phipps was sitting in our little house, telling, with tears running down his cheeks, the story of my fate, there came a wire from the owners of the *Ludlow Castle* with the news that I had been picked up. Some weeks later there arrived a letter from

Captain Custance telling of my disappearance from the liner; also my own letter to my father. After another interval there came the tale of my trip up the river with the *Lady Lucy's* mate, of the accident to the boat, and of my subsequent disappearance.

There was no talk of Sylvester & Ashford's office now; the vacant place had been filled up, and indeed Yeo said that he could not have recommended "our Mr. Ashford" to accept a boy of such uncertain and wandering habits. But Mr. Drake had written to my father speaking highly in my praise; moreover, he had spoken of me to some influential friends; and in the end arrangements were made for my entering the merchant service in a first-class line of sailing-ships.

So I have had my way and lived a wandering life, seeing many distant lands. I have been more than once again to the Malay Peninsula; have met my kind friend Mr. Drake, now holding a far higher post than when we lived together in the Talok house. But I have never gone far up the country nor seen Mat.

In the Great War, I, like so many others, was caught up into the fighting-line; and it was while in command of a trawler that, as I have said on the first page, I lost a leg.

This, then, is the long tale of my adventures. I have tried hard to set down everything quite fairly, not to boast of anything I did; indeed I have no cause to boast, for any way in which I was of use to others was pure chance. Sitting at home in Sheldon my

thoughts often travel back to all that I went through. Clearest of all the many scenes that I remember is the sight of Mat, as, stooping in the semi-darkness of the Talok kitchen, the old hunter settled his account with Prang.

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